

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 3:1-15

^{3:1} Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." ¹³ But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations."

Commentary

Moses felt inadequate for the task and offered several excuses for why he could not do this. And how would Moses explain who sent him? God gave the cryptic answer, "I AM who I AM."

We sometimes Anglicize these four Hebrew letters, YHWH, spelling and pronouncing them as “Yahweh,” which can mean “I am what I am” or “I will be what I will be.” But this could be an affront to our Jewish friends, who believe the name of God should remain unpronounced. In any case, the God who met Moses was the one who had the power to do what Moses was called to declare to Pharaoh: free the Hebrew slaves.

Reflection

The “I AM” in this passage emphasizes the mystery and austerity of a distant and powerful God. What other images of God are meaningful for you?

Romans 12:9-21

^{12:9} Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Commentary

Paul continues his commentary on the new life in Christ by offering a series of moral guidelines and attitudes for everyday living. Paul made only one direct reference to the specific teachings of Jesus, although his writings are consistent with the message of the Gospels. In this fairly self-explanatory and terse list of advice, two points deserve further mention: First, his comments point to the final authority of God in matters of justice. Human nature being what it is, Paul reminds his readers that there is no virtue or true satisfaction in revenge or retribution. Also, in ancient Egyptian culture, a bucket of hot coals would be brought to the forehead of a penitent to symbolize a purified and repentant mind. Paul alludes to this practice to indicate that genuine love moves us toward repentance and forgiveness, not vengeance and punishment.

Reflection

Reflect on the virtues Paul lists. Which ones did you especially need to hear? Which ones do you feel describe your actions and attitudes?

Matthew 16:21-28

^{16:21} From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷ "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Commentary

This passage marks a turning point in Jesus' life. The confession was made that he was Christ, the Messiah. Peter, and subsequently the church, had been given authority to proclaim the teachings of Jesus and to interpret them for the good of the whole community. In time, God would make it clear that this was not a defeat but a great victory. The Son of Man would be vindicated, as would his faithful followers. Those who would lose (give) their lives—physical, spiritual, or both—for Christ's sake would find (gain) them. Without a life in him, Jesus told them, there was really no life.

Reflection

What does it mean for you to take up your cross? What is the challenge of discipleship for you right now?

Responsive Psalter

Psalms 105:1-6, 23-26, 45b

- ^{105:1} O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.
- ² Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.
- ³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- ⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.

- ⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
- ⁶ O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.
- ^{105:23} Then Israel came to Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.
- ²⁴ And the LORD made his people very fruitful, and made them stronger than their foes,
- ²⁵ whose hearts he then turned to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants.
- ²⁶ He sent his servant Moses, and Aaron whom he had chosen.
- ^{105:45b} 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.