

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 16:2-15

^{16:2} The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" ⁸ And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him--what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD." ⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" ¹⁰ And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹ The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹² "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" ¹³ In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

Commentary

What have you done for me this week? This question is not new; the Hebrews under Moses' leadership asked the same thing. Just a few weeks after rejoicing over their escape from Egypt

and singing Moses' (and God's) praises, the Israelites were fearfully complaining of their discomfort in the wilderness. The wilderness was a place of hunger and death. In the Sinai Peninsula food and water were in short supply. Egypt, on the other hand, was a place where there had been bread and meat. Israel had already forgotten the hardships of slavery and remembered only that there had been enough food to eat. The glory of God was manifested to Israel both in the cloud (mystery) and in the provision of food (practicality). This revelation helped them to begin to deal with reality. They now began to turn away from their romanticized memory of Egypt.

Reflection

"The glory of God was manifested in both mystery and practicality." The voice of the cloud was awesome. The food on the table met a basic need. One they demanded; the other astounded them. How and when do we experience God's glory?

Philippians 1:21-30

^{1:21} For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵ Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶ so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. ²⁷ Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹ For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well-- ³⁰ since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Commentary

Paul had a special relationship with the church at Philippi. They were the first converts during his ministry in Europe. In this letter, Paul writes to his dear friends from prison, probably in Rome. He begins by talking about an upcoming trial. He thinks he will be acquitted, but warns that he might not be. Either way it will be well with him. If he dies, his life will be fulfilled in Christ. Death and life are the same, since either way he is with Christ. But death will bring him the more intimate relationship with Christ he has been seeking. In fact, if he has to choose, he is not sure whether he will take life or death.

Reflection

Is our faith such that living eternally with Christ or continuing to live in this life would be a hard choice?

Matthew 20:1-16

^{20:1} "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴ and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. ⁵ When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶ And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?' ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Commentary

Our sympathies in this passage tend to reside with those who are hired first. Consider, though, another story about productivity in the work force. Recognize that it reflects the economic and social realities of the time. Early every morning, day laborers gathered in the village square hoping to be hired. They literally lived from day to day; if they were not hired, they could not buy food for their families that day. Read the story in that light, and think about the increasing desperation of those who had not been hired as the day went on.

Reflection

What social and economic realities shape our thinking about work? Do we spend time at work thinking about work? What does the gospel say to our work situation?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

^{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.

^{105:37} Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold, and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.

³⁸ Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it.

³⁹ He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night.

⁴⁰ They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them food from heaven in abundance.

⁴¹ He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.

⁴² For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant.

⁴³ So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing.

⁴⁴ He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,

⁴⁵ that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws. 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.