

Sunday, March 27, 2022
Fourth Sunday of Lent
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Joshua 5:9-12

By celebrating the Passover and eating the produce of the promised land instead of the miraculous manna that had sustained them in the desert, the Israelites symbolically bring their forty years of wilderness wandering to an end at Gilgal.

⁹The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

Text Questions

What did they (the men) do to “roll away” the disgrace of Egypt? (verse 9—see also the preceding verses 7-8) The notes say that the name Gilgal is related to the Hebrew word for “to roll.” What did the Israelites do when they were camped in Gilgal? (verse 10) Where did the grain for the bread come from? (verse 11) What happened to the manna they had been eating? (verse 12) Note that eating the Passover and circumcision are the most important marks of Jewish identity. Have you ever celebrated the Passover? What would it mean to you? Does the meaning change, since we worship a Jewish man?

Psalm 32

Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD. (Ps. 32:11)

¹Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!

²**Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!**

³While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.

⁴**For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.**

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my
guilt.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." Then you
forgave me the guilt of my sin.

⁶**Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you
in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.**

⁷You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

⁸**"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should
go;**

I will guide you with my eye.

⁹Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not
stay near you."

¹⁰**Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.**

¹¹Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

Text Questions

This psalm reminds us of how important forgiveness is to us. What does the word “happy” mean to you in this context? (verses 1-2) What happens to us when we do not confess our sins? (verses 3-4) Have you ever experienced this? Why is it important to acknowledge our sin and confess? (verse 5) What does God do when we confess, and pray to God in times of trouble? (verses 5-6) What do you think it means when it says that God is “my hiding place” and God “preserves us from trouble”? (verse 7) How will God help us? (verse 8) To what does the psalmist compare those who will not confess? (verse 9) What happens to them? (verse 10) Why should we be glad? (verse 11) What does it mean to “shout for joy,” and why is it good and true?

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

One way to describe the gospel is the promise that in Christ everything is transformed into newness. All mistakes, all deliberate sins, all old history is reconciled with Christ’s resurrection. This is Paul’s strong message to the congregation in the city of Corinth.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through

us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Text Questions

*As you may remember, when a verse begins with “therefore,” it means we should pay attention to what came before it. What is Paul remembering? (see the preceding verses 14-15) Because Christ has died for all, how do we see other people? (verse 16) Why don’t we look at others “through a human point of view”? How do we see them now? (verse 17) How have we become new? (verse 18) What does it mean that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation? Who is now reconciled to God? (verse 19) What is our ministry, given to us by God, in this reconciliation? (verse 20) Can we be reconciled to others if we are not reconciled to God? Also, can we be reconciled to God if we are not reconciled to others? What do you think it means that God made the One who was without sin to **be** sin? (verse 21) What then happens to us and all of God’s creation? Sometimes we feel sinful, unreconciled. This is when God’s word (like this passage) comes to us to remind us of who we really are—the righteousness/holiness of God.*

Gospel

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Jesus tells a parable about a son who ponders his father’s love only after he has spurned it. The grace he receives is beyond his hopes. That same grace is a crisis for an older brother who believes it is his obedience that has earned his place in the father’s home.

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³So he told them this parable: ^{11b}“There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸Then he became

angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Text Questions

Who came to Jesus in order to listen to him? (verse 1) How did the Pharisees and the scribes feel about this? (verse 2) Jesus then tells a story. Who are the characters in this story? (verse 11) What did the younger son want? (verse 12) What did the father do? What then did the younger son do? (verse 13) What happened to the younger son then? (verses 14-15) Remember that to Jesus' audience, pigs were unclean—not suitable for any good Jew to touch/eat/have anything to do with? What would the son have been willing to do, if he could? (verse 16) When the son came to his senses, what did he think, and then do? (verse 17-19) What did the father do when he saw his son? (verse 20) The story says that the son made his speech to the father. (verse 21) Did the father pay attention to it? What did he do instead? (verses 22-24) What did the older son do when he heard the party in progress? (verses 25-27) Was the older son invited to the party? (verse 28) What did he do with that invitation? (verse 29-30) What did the father say to him? (verses 31-32) Do you think the older son was justified in what he did? —We know that Jesus didn't, but what do you think? Have you ever been jealous of someone who gets all the attention, seemingly just because they

are bad? How can we repent if we don't think we've done anything wrong?