

Sunday, March 6, 2022
First Sunday of Lent
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

The annual harvest festival, called the Feast of Weeks, provides the setting for this reading. This festival celebrates the first fruits of the produce of the land offered back to God in thanks. In this text, worshipers announce God's gracious acts on behalf of Israel.

¹When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before

the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

Text Questions

This text gives the Israelites a ritual they are to celebrate and observe. When are they to do it? (verse 1) What are they to give to God? (verse 2) How do they choose which of the harvest they are to offer? What is the liturgy of the offering they are to say to the priest? (verse 3) What will the priest do with the offering? (verse 4) What is the prayer they are to respond with? (verses 5-9) Who was the “wandering Aramean”? (verse 5) This refers to Jacob (see Genesis 29-31), who spent much of his life with his uncle Laban, who lived in Aram, which we know today as Syria. For the story of how Jacob and his family went down to Egypt, see Genesis 46-47. The story of how the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt is in Exodus 1. (verses 6-7) How did God answer their cries against their oppression? (verses 7-8) Who was the one chosen by God to lead them out of Egypt? How did they get to the land “flowing with milk and honey”? (verse 9) Whom did they thank for the bounty they had in this promised land? (verse 10) Who got to celebrate this thanksgiving offering? (verse 11) Why wasn’t it just the farmers themselves? What can we learn about what we offer to God from this text?

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

God will give the angels charge over you, to guard you in all your ways. (Ps. 91:11)

¹You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty—

**²you will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my stronghold,
my God in whom I put my trust.”**

⁹Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
and the Most High your habitation,

**¹⁰no evil will befall you,
nor shall affliction come near your dwelling.**

¹¹For God will give the angels charge over you,
to guard you in all your ways.

**¹²Upon their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.**

¹³You will tread upon the lion cub and viper;
you will trample down the lion and the serpent.

**¹⁴I will deliver those who cling to me;
I will uphold them, because they know my name.**

¹⁵They will call me, and I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue and honor them.

**¹⁶With long life will I satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.**

Text Questions

Who does the psalmist direct in the singing/praying of this psalm? (verse 1) What are they to sing to God? (verse 2) What will happen to them because they trust in God? (verses 9-10) Who will God use to protect them? (verses 11-12) What will happen to their enemies, those who threaten them? (verse 13) Why has God promised to deliver them from evil? (verse 14) What are they to do when they are in trouble? (verse 15) What will God do for them? (verses 15-16) I know many people who do not feel that they are rescued from all trouble. Nevertheless they pray to God. What do you do in times of trouble?

Second Reading

Romans 10:8b-13

Paul reminds the Christians at Rome of the foundation of their creed, the confession of faith in the risen Christ as Lord.

^{8b}“The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Text Questions

What is the word that is on our lips and in our hearts? (verse 8) Verse 9 reminds us of what it is. How will we be saved? (verses 9-10) I think verse 11 refers to the promises in Psalm 91. Who will be saved? Only some people? Or all people? (verses 12-13) Paul is being very bold in proclaiming that not only Jews, but also Greeks (that is, us Gentiles) will be saved. How can we speak this word and trust in it?

Gospel

Luke 4:1-13

After being filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus is led in the wilderness. Through his responses to the temptations of the devil, he defines what it means to be called “the Son of God.”

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’

¹¹and

‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Text Questions

Why did Jesus go out into the wilderness? Who prompted him to go there? (verse 1) How long did he spend in the wilderness? (verse 2) What happened at the end of the time he was there? These “temptations” might be translated as “tests.” Notes in the Lutheran Bible tell us that the one who tested Jesus developed out of the character in the book of Job, who made sure that those who

were tested (like Job) were up to the task given them. (See Job 1:6-12) What was the first test? (verse 3) This reminds us of the test given to Eve and Adam in Genesis 3. What did they do when they were offered forbidden food? (Genesis 3:2-6) How did Jesus answer the devil? (verse 4) What was the second test? (verses 5-7) How did Jesus respond? (verse 8) This test reminds us of how the Israelites reacted when they thought Moses might be dead on the mountain? (see Exodus 32:1-6) What was the third test? (verse 9) How did the devil try to test Jesus? Have you ever heard the saying, "even the devil quotes Scripture for his own purposes"? See where the devil was quoting Scripture by looking at our Psalm for the day, Psalm 91:11-12. What was Jesus' response? (verse 12) Jesus was found up to the task! Where did the devil go? (verse 13) How do we respond when we are tempted? Who gives us the means to say no, or the forgiveness if we don't?