

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.

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

^{8:18} My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. ¹⁹ Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" ("Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?") ²⁰ "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." ²¹ For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. ²² Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

^{9:1} O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!

Commentary

From Chapter 1, we know that Jeremiah was either born or began his ministry in 627 BC. During his life, Babylonia succeeded Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. When Babylon captured Jerusalem in 587, Jeremiah emigrated to Egypt. God called him to be a prophet to Judah and surrounding nations, amid these political and religious convulsions.

Precise dating of this passage is not possible, but the closing years of the 600s is likely. These were times when the leaders and people of Judah, the southern kingdom, had been straying from God's ways for generations. They had formed alliances with foreign countries (e.g. Egypt) in the hope of avoiding invasion from the north (probably from Babylon, but the Scythians, a war-like tribe from near the Black Sea, were probably also a threat to regional stability). In earlier readings, we have seen Jeremiah link religious apostasy with these policies - for through contact with foreigners, Judah had adopted their ways and their gods.

Jeremiah is *sick at heart* (8:18), distressed over Judah's conduct. He sees Judah as doomed, for she has not heeded God's call for conversion back to his ways. At the last moment (or after raids on their cities have started), they realize their calamity, and cry: has God (their "King", 8:19) left his earthly dwelling in the Temple in Jerusalem ("Zion"), i.e. deserted them? (He was believed to dwell in the Holy of Holies, above the altar.) In 8:19b, God ("me") interrupts, speaking through Jeremiah; the people have "provoked" God by their adoption of foreign gods and ways. 8:20 may speak of a year of drought, but more likely of the end of the *good times*. Jeremiah really loves his people ("my ... people", 8:19, 21, 22), so it really hurts him to see them suffer. He asks: is there not a way of restoring them to health? ("Balm", 8:22, a resin from a

tree which grew east of the Jordan (“Gilead”), was used for medicinal purposes.) He can’t weep enough for Judah (9:1); whether he means “slain” literally or figuratively is unknown. In 9:2, he wishes that he could avoid this place of disaster, be almost anywhere else, for the people are “adulterers” and “traitors”: they are totally corrupt.

Reflection

Jeremiah weeps and bemoans his people’s fate, even as he lays their sins and transgressions out before them. Like a parent, he both loves his people and is (righteously) angry with them. Why do you think the hard and painful laments of the Old Testament prophets have been preserved as Holy Scripture?

1 Timothy 2:1-7

^{2:1} First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, ⁶ who gave himself a ransom for all--this was attested at the right time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Commentary

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the *Pastoral Epistles* because the author addresses the needs and responsibilities of the leaders of Christian communities. Although they claim to be written by Paul, the structure of the church they show and the specific content of their teaching indicate that they were written a generation or so after Paul. In those days, a writer sometimes honored an earlier leader by writing in his name.

At a time when Christians were suspect for not joining in worship of Roman gods, an act expected of all, the author urges them to pray for “everyone”, including civil authorities (“kings ...”, v. 2), so that Christians may live “a quiet and peaceable life”, as *good citizens* yet godly ones. This, he says, is in accord with God’s plan, for he wishes “everyone” (v. 4) to be saved, through knowledge of Christian “truth”. God desires this for:

- he is the “one God” (v. 5) for all people;
- the “one mediator”, Christ, shared in being human with all of us, and represents us all before the Father, and
- gave his life as the price of freedom (“ransom”, v. 6) for all.

His life and death were “attested” (shown to be an authentic part of the plan) “at the right time”, at the time chosen by God. Paul, or the writer of this letter, (“I”, v. 7) was “appointed” by God to announce (“herald”) this to all, genuinely sent out by him (“apostle”) to teach doctrine (“faith”) and the truth about God to everyone.

Reflection

The writer of I Timothy urges Christians to pray for “kings and all who are in high positions.” For us today, that would mean praying for the civil and political authorities of our world – and Lord knows, they need our prayers! Do you include these representatives in your devotions – everyone from the President to the mayor?

Luke 16:1-13

^{16:1} Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ² So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' ³ Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' ⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' ⁷ Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' ⁸ And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. ¹⁰ "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Commentary

Three gospels in the New Testament offer similar portraits of the life of Jesus; Luke is the third of them. Its author, traditionally Luke the physician who accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, often includes women, the poor, the ill, and the marginalized in his stories about Jesus' life.

As he continues to travel towards Jerusalem, Jesus says more about what is required of a disciple. Many in the crowd were poor, oppressed by the rich, so a story about a “rich man” (vv. 1-8a) would be popular. Jesus speaks in their terms, calling money “dishonest wealth” (v. 9) or *filthy lucre*. (A “manager”, v. 1, negotiated and signed contracts on his master’s behalf; the master was usually a (hated) absentee landlord.) The Law of Moses forbade charging interest on a loan, but there was a way round this: the debtor in v. 6 had probably received 50 jugs of olive oil but the bill was for 100. The manager settles the account by forgiving the usurious interest, probably to his master’s benefit, not his own. Both the “master” (v. 8, the rich man) and the manager are businessmen; the master praises the manager for acting “shrewdly” (the Greek word means *pragmatically*). Both understand prudent use of financial resources.

Being “faithful” now involves sharing possessions; one who doesn’t now won’t be entrusted with “true riches” (v. 11), i.e. the Kingdom. Financial resources are God’s gift; they belong “to another” (v. 12), i.e. to him. “Your own” is your inheritance as God’s children, i.e. eternal life. So in v. 12 Jesus asks: *if you have not managed your finances prudently, will God give you eternal life?* Then v. 13: one cannot make a god out of money and serve God. Disciples must serve God exclusively, using material resources for his purposes, sharing with the needy. The alternative is enslavement to materialism.

Reflection

The parable of the Dishonest Manager is such a challenge to our sensibilities! How do you think Jesus can seem to commend dishonesty? What attitude towards money is revealed in this passage?

Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 79:1-9

^{79:1} O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

² They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth.

³ They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

⁴ We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

⁵ How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?

⁶ Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name.

⁷ For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

⁸ Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low.

⁹ Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake.

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.