

Thursday, May 21, 2020

Daily Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:15-23;

Luke 24:44-53 & Acts 1:1-11

Psalm 47 (NRSV)

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.
He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.
He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves.
God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.
God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted.



Thought:

The Psalm speaks of God's choice of Jacob (Israel) as the nation that would bring about God's reign. From Jacob, God would rule over all the nations. The nations will sing praise to God, while God is on His throne. In the middle of this song, the phrase, "God has gone up with a shout." It is at the ascension of Jesus that God went up into the heavens to be Lord over all the nations. Until this time, God's salvation plan focused on Israel. Even Jesus' ministry was to the 12 disciples representing the 12 tribes of Israel. When Jesus ascended into heaven, to sit at the right hand of God the Father, he began his reign over all nations. Our response is to sing praises to God.

This Psalm now looks to the past of Jesus' ascension, it also looks to the future when all nations will be gathered into the presence of God. For "the shields of the earth belong to God." As nations are represented by flags today, the shield was the symbol of a nation. Imagine a room where every flag of every nation throughout history is represented, much like the United Nations of history. Through Jesus Christ, all those flags, all their leaders, all the people represented, are under the authority of God.

As the great hymn states, "Come, thou Almighty King, help us thy name to sing, help us to praise...come and reign over us...our sure defense be made, our souls on thee be stayed...now rule in ev'ry heart...His sov'reign majesty may we in glory see." May we worship the Almighty King.

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NRSV)

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Thought:

When I was doing research for my doctoral program, I realized it was taking longer and longer to read a book or article. Having lived a life with 20/20 vision, I never visited an eye doctor. When I finally went, I was diagnosed with presbyopia (elder eyes). I started with low strength reading glasses. As the nerves got used to not straining to read, my prescription changed each time I went. Finally, the nerves adjusted, and I now have the same prescription every year.

In this passage, Paul calls us to go to the eye doctor, for the eyes in our heart. We need to have eyes that are able to see God's overarching redemption drama in our particular world. In a sense, we need to put on our Jesus glasses and see God in control. God has placed Jesus in the place of power ruling over all creation. When we look at our daily struggles and situations, we lose focus on God's reign. Spending time reading the Bible and hearing the events of Jesus dying, being raised from the dead, ascending into heaven and sitting at the right hand of God, brings the vision of our heart back into focus. We are able to see the world in a whole new light.

Maybe it is where I am today, as I read this passage, another song immediately came to mind. "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, Open the eyes of my heart, I want to see You, I want to see You, To see You high and lifted up, Shinin' in the light of Your glory, Pour out Your power and love, As we sing holy, holy, holy." My God open the eyes of our hearts that we see Jesus ascend to heaven and reign in glory.

Luke 24:44-53 (NRSV)

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Thought:

God does not want us to check our brains at the door when it comes to faith. On the day of ascension, Jesus "opened their minds to understanding the scriptures." Jesus wants us to read the scriptures, in this case the Old Testament, to understand God's salvation story. There is an

overarching drama of God's redeeming history. God wrote all the chapters of the story: creation and fall; call of Abraham and a new nation; the nation of Israel; Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension; and the final judgment. The climax of God's drama is Jesus. When he was about to ascend into heaven, he opened their minds to understand God's work throughout history. We are now in the last days, awaiting the completion of all history.

In Ephesians we read of God opening the eyes of our heart. In Luke, we read of Jesus opening the eyes of the mind. God wants our hearts and minds to understand the blessing of Jesus Christ in our lives. In Jesus, we have forgiveness of sins and receive the blessings of God. We are invited to share this message with all nations. God's salvation message is for all people.

Acts 1:1-11 (NRSV)

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Thought:

It has been 40 days since Easter. We often think of Easter as a day. It is a season between Easter morning and Pentecost (May 31 this year). During these fifty days, the disciples waited in Jerusalem for the coming of Jesus' Holy Spirit. They would soon be sent out to take the message of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins to the entire world. Before that happened, two events needed to take place. Each year, we celebrate Pentecost to remember the giving of Holy Spirit. We do this because Pentecost falls on a Sunday.

Today, we celebrate the day of Ascension. For 40 days, Jesus had walked, ate and taught his disciples about the kingdom of God. On this day, they gathered in Bethany. Jesus told them to wait for his Holy Spirit. With the gift of the Holy Spirit, they (and we) are empowered to be witnesses of Jesus salvation to all the world. The disciples are still looking back: "When will you restore Israel." Jesus is looking forward: God's message of salvation is for all nations, beginning in Jerusalem, then throughout Judea, to their neighbors in Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth.

Once Jesus ascended into heaven, they kept looking up, longing for the past, longing to see Jesus. It is then that they are told, "why are you looking up?" Jesus will return in the same way he went up, yet they were told to go into Jerusalem and await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Then, to go to the ends of the earth. We remember the ascension to celebrate that Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father. And we are his witnesses until the day Jesus comes again.

Prayer:

God of majesty, you led Jesus through suffering and death into resurrected life. On the day of ascension, you took him up to the glory of heaven. Clothe us with the power of the Holy Spirit promised from on high. Send us forth to the ends of the earth as messengers of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Guide us as witnesses of Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead, who lives and reigns with you now and always in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

(Spend time in silent prayer, praying for those you know. Name them before God and place them in God's loving arms).

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.