

**First United Methodist Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Lectionary Study Guide**

For use the week of February 18-24, 2019

7th Sunday after the Epiphany

February 24, 2019

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.

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.'" ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Commentary

Joseph's brothers are stunned into silence. In their wildest imagination, they could not have guessed that their brother would become second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. Joseph points out that the brothers "sold (him) here" but follows with "God sent me before you to preserve life." This does not mean that the brothers are guiltless, as Joseph will acknowledge later when he says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good". God did not cause the brothers to commit a sin, but simply turned the effects of their sin from bad to good. It is God's actions that deserve celebration here—not the earlier sinful actions of the brothers. Joseph has every right to hold his brothers fully accountable for selling him into slavery but chooses not to do so—chooses to turn his spiritual eyes from their evil deed to God's good end. It is a moment of pure grace.

Reflection

Can evil actions be used by God for good results? When have you seen this happen?

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰ What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Commentary

Paul has been talking about resurrection, both of Christ (vv. 1-11) and of the dead (vv. 12-34). He has been presenting the “for resurrection” case. Now he begins to address those who would deny resurrection. Those who would oppose the idea of resurrection would ask two questions: “How are the dead raised?”, and “With what kind of body do they come?” Paul introduces a metaphor from gardening that everyone had experienced and would understand. When they have sown a seed, they know that they can’t expect to recover the original seed once a plant has grown from the seed. What is sown is quite different from that which will result from the sowing. A corn stalk looks quite different from the grain of corn that produced it. Paul now relates the seed and plant to the human body. When we die, our bodies are sown (buried) to corruption. In other words, our bodies begin to decay, even as a seed planted in the ground begins to decay as it prepares to give birth to a new plant. But that decay isn’t the end of the story, but the beginning. The body which was sown in corruption is raised in incorruption—no longer subject to decay, and now (as incorruptible bodies) fit for the Kingdom of God.

Reflection

No farmer would ever want for a seed he or she planted to remain a seed, but rather for that seed to become the plant it was meant to be. In what ways are you changing into the fullness that God intends for you to become?

Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Commentary

It is natural to reciprocate—to help those who help you and hurt those who hurt you. Reciprocity is a natural, commonsense way to order one’s life, and is far more enlightened than the aggressive, selfish approach that many people favor today. “Do unto others as they do unto you” has morphed into “Do unto others *before* they do to you” and simply “Do unto others!” In such a dog-eat-dog world, reciprocity seems positively enlightened. Its goal is fairness. The bad person suffers, and the good person prospers. It is as it should be.

And yet Jesus tells us that reciprocity is not kingdom behavior. Just as God goes beyond justice to mercy, we are to do the same. It is a hard lesson, one that goes against the grain. It is unnatural. We can move beyond justice to mercy, but only through the grace of God. The principle is “Love your enemies.” The examples which Jesus provides to illustrate the word “love” are not directed at feelings but at actions. Jesus calls us to love (Greek: *agape*), but that does not mean that we must have warm and fuzzy feelings for those who mistreat us. Instead, we are to act in ways calculated to benefit the other person—to make that person’s welfare our concern.

Reflection

How do we live our lives so as to “benefit the other person – to make that other person’s welfare our concern”? Does Jesus really expect his disciples to follow this style of living?

- ¹ Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
- ² **for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.**
- ³ Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
- ⁴ **Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.**
- ⁵ Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
- ⁶ He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.
- ⁷ **Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.**
- ⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
- ⁹ **For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.**
- ¹⁰ Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
- ¹¹ **But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.**
- ³⁹ The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;
he is their refuge in the time of trouble.
- ⁴⁰ **The Lord helps them and rescues them;
he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.**

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.

Commentary content adapted from www.sermonwriter.com.