

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Fourth Sunday in Lent (C)

Joshua 5.9-12

Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5.16-21

Luke 15.11b-32

Joshua 5.9-12

- 1) The lesson recounts Israel's crossing of the Jordan, into the Promised Land.
 - a) A thematic element throughout Joshua is highlighted. The LORD is with Israel.
 - i) At Josh. 1.5; 3.7; and 4.14, the LORD tells Joshua, "... as I was with Moses, so I will be with you ...". At 4.14, specifically, the LORD recites that Israel will be exalted (by crossing into the promised Land).
- 2) The Israelites mark the crossing into the Promised Land by keeping the Passover.
 - a) The reference to eating unleavened bread, in the absence of any mention of a lamb, indicates that the ceremony at Gilgal probably reflected an older ceremony of the Unleavened Bread (*cf.* Exod. 23.15; 34.18).
 - i) This festival seems to have been more communally oriented than family oriented.
- 3) This is the first celebration of the Passover since the Israelites left Egypt.
 - a) Combined with the crossing of the Jordan, this closes the period of Moses and the wandering, which began with Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea.
 - i) The conclusion of this period in Israel's history is signaled, dramatically, by the fact that the manna from heaven ceases. The people now eat the produce of the land.

Psalm 32

- 1) In English practice (the so-called "Sarum use" of Salisbury Cathedral, from which comes much of *The Book of Common Prayer*), this penitential psalm is used at "Prime" on every day of Lent.
 - a) Prime was the third monastic prayer office of each day, occurring about 6 a.m.
 - i) In other words, penitence is emphasized before work begins.
- 2) The psalm is a wisdom psalm, teaching that to acknowledge sin is to be in right relationship with the LORD.
 - a) God is merciful to those who trust in Him.
 - b) The elements of thanksgiving which are found throughout the psalm are didactic, teaching how one is to respond to God's mercy.
 - c) Not to confess sin is to persist in iniquity, and this leads to destruction (vv. 3-4).

2 Corinthians 5.16-21

- 1) 2 Corinthians was likely written in A.D. 55, and so is one of the earliest extant Christian writings.
- 2) In this lesson, Paul concludes a long argument on authentic apostleship. He has already spoken of the love of Christ (5.14) as the authentic model of existence (*cf.* Gal. 2.20; Rom. 8.35-38).

- a) To be “in Christ” (5.17) is to be a member of the believing community (*cf.* 1 Cor. 6.15; 8.12; 12.12).
 - i) The community, the Church, is the Body of Christ.
- 3) A “new creation”: To be in Christ is to be in a new creation.
 - a) In apocalyptic thought, a new creation inaugurated the *eschaton*, the end times.
 - i) Thus, “... everything has become new!” (5.17)
 - b) This newness indicates a new standard of *judgment*.
 - i) To be “in Christ” is to fall under a new (redeemed) standard of judgment.
 - ii) Radical change takes place through living in acceptance of the standard of humanity represented in Christ.
- 4) Paul switches (5.18) to God’s plan. In the divine plan human agents mediate God’s grace (*cf.* 1 Cor. 3.5-9).
 - a) Only when restored to authentic human existence are we at peace with God. This restoration was effected through Jesus.
 - b) As ambassadors for Christ, Christians not only represent Him, but prolong and extend His mission.
 - i) God makes His “appeal through us”: God respects the free choice of His created beings. He *appeals* to all to follow His Way.
- 5) “[H]e made him to be sin”: Jesus became part of sinful humanity (Gal. 3.13) so that we through Him might become part of the righteousness of God. This was by God’s choice (Rom. 8.3).

Luke 15.11b-32

- 1) In ch. 15, Jesus uses three parables to illustrate how God’s mercy breaks through all human restrictions. The last of these parables is the famous story of the Prodigal Son.
- 2) In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus plays upon His hearer’s knowledge of two-brothers stories, in which the younger brother triumphs over the older brother(s).
 - a) Essau and Jacob, Gen. 25.27-34; 27.1-36; Joseph and his brothers, Gen. 37.1-4.
 - b) Jesus reverses expectations:
 - i) The prodigal son is a parody of the successful younger brother.
 - ii) The older brother is not vanquished, but is invited to the feast.
- 3) Here, the younger brother has sunk to the depths of engaging in Gentile ways, *e.g.*, in feeding the pigs.
 - a) In returning to his father, he articulates true repentance.
 - b) The father, in running to greet his son, acts in a way not to be expected from an elderly gentleman in his position and time.
- 4) The father forgives his son who has become a Gentile (*e.g.*, who has turned his back on him). This forgiveness is ceremonialized with robe, ring, and shoes, all betokening the status of a free man.
- 5) The reaction of the older brother is one of self-righteousness, and can be seen in the light of Jesus’ criticisms of the Pharisees in Luke.
 - a) Indeed, the older brother refers to his brother as “this son of yours”.

- b) Yet, Jesus leaves the parable open.
 - i) Will the older brother enter the banquet hall?
 - ii) Will the righteous meet with sinners, to lead them to God?