LENT I

Year C

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Deuteronomy 26:1-11

26 "When 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, [2] you 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. [3] You 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.' [4] When the priest takes the basket from your hand
and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your
God, [5] you 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. [6] When the Egyptians
treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard
labor on us, [7] we cried to the Lord, the God of our
ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our
affliction, our toil, and our
oppression. [8] The 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; [9] and he brought us into this place and gave
us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. [10] So
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. [11] Then 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.

Commentary from Benjamin Hopkins

The service of Ash Wednesday which begins the season of Lent reminds us that, from the earliest days, those who followed Jesus prepared for the celebration of his passion and resurrection through important rites (rituals). Baptism is a rite of passage through which we are joined to Christ and become members of the church. Other rituals can be ways that we remember we are part of a community that God has promised to sustain as well as recall that humans are always in need of God's saving power. The Hebrew people, too, had important rituals for remembering who they were, and how their existence as a people showed God's mighty power of salvation. Their gift of the first fruits of their harvest, the first life-sustaining food from their labor and the product of the land given to them by God was a gift of thanksgiving and praise. This gift was an important reminder of the status of humanity within the created order and their dependence on the God who created them and placed them as stewards of creation.

Discussion Questions

What in your life would constitute "first fruits" that you might give to God in thanksgiving for God's love and mercy?

What other rites (rituals) besides baptism and reconciliation do you participate in at church? Are they more focused on joining the community or sustaining it? Name some important symbols or actions associated with these rites.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

[1] He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, *
abides under the shadow of the Almighty.
[2] He shall say to the Lord,
"You are my refuge and my stronghold, *
my God in whom I put my trust."

[9] Because you have made the Lord your refuge, *
and the Most High your habitation,
[10] There shall no evil happen to you, *
neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.
[11] For he shall give his angels charge over you, *
to keep you in all your ways.
[12] They shall bear you in their hands, *
lest you dash your foot against a stone.
[13] You shall tread upon the lion and adder; *
you shall trample the young lion and the serpent under your feet.
[14] Because he is bound to me in love,
therefore will I deliver him; *
I will protect him, because he knows my Name.
[15] He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; *
I am with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and bring him to honor.
[16] With long life will I satisfy him, *
and show him my salvation.

Commentary from Benjamin Hopkins

This psalm describes God's character as strong, powerful, and ready to save those who call upon God's name. Jesus is sustained by these truths during his time of temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). Although Satan quotes them to Jesus, only Jesus understands what they mean. To be "bound to [God] in love" and to know God's name are the attributes of the faithful. The one who "dwells in the shelter of the Most High" has come to know and trust God through encountering God in the stories of Scripture that reveal God's character.

Discussion Questions

How has God revealed Godself to you through Scripture, the church, or in the person of Jesus?

How does your knowledge of God help keep you safe in times of trouble or temptation? Have you seen or experienced "the shelter of the Most High?"

Where have you come to know God's Name? How do you feel that you are "bound to [God] in love?"

Romans 10:8b-13

[8b] "The word is near you,
in your mouth and in your heart"

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

Commentary from Benjamin Hopkins

This reading is contained within an extended argument in which Paul explains Gentile inclusion in Israel's salvation history while acknowledging Jewish hesitancy to accept Jesus as Messiah. Paul writes that God's salvation is available for all: Jew *and* Gentile. Salvation for all is possible because of God's work (Romans 9:16: "So it depends not on human will or exertion but on God who shows mercy."). Therefore, even Paul's Gentile audience in Rome is able to claim Jesus as Lord and be sure of God's salvation.

Discussion Questions

This scripture is often used as a kind of formula to "prove" or "claim" salvation. Read in the context of the entire chapter (and chapter 9 before), do you see other possibilities for what this verse might mean?

If salvation is from God, what part does human action play in choosing to accept or reject God's generous gift? Why would God allow humans to choose to reject this gift?

Luke 4:1-13

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

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

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

9 Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him
on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you
are the Son of God, throw yourself down from
here, **10** for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'

11 and

'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a
stone.'"

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

Commentary from Benjamin Hopkins

Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit for forty days, in an echo of the Hebrews' forty-year sojourn in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt, and as a time of spiritual preparation for his earthly ministry. His temptation mirrors the temptations and trials of the Hebrews, and his resistance through total reliance on God through the use of Scripture shows Jesus to be an embodiment of faithful Israel and the one who will fulfill the Covenant. Jesus' refusal to turn inward for strength and sustenance, his refusal to worship anything but God, and his acknowledgment and acceptance of the limits of his humanity on his expression of divinity (see Philippians 2:6: "Who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped.") are all grounded in an embodied knowledge of God found within Hebrew Scripture. Lent is a time when we can practice journeying with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, examining our lives, returning to Scripture for nourishment, and asking God to forgive us for times when temptation has overcome our desire to love God and love our neighbor.

Discussion Questions

Jesus is tempted physically (bread), materially (authority of rule over kingdoms), and spiritually (test the power of God). How are we tempted in similar ways in our lives? What do we know about God from Scripture that we can use to overcome these temptations?

What gives you hope as you read this scripture? Where do you find Good News?

What spiritual discipline or practice have you taken on, given up, or focused on this Lent? How do you believe this can help you keep a Holy Lent?

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