



The readings today focus on the new life that is available through our relationship with God. In Joshua we read that the manna ceased on the day that the Israelites ate of the produce of the land. They still needed God but in a new way now that the Israelites had come through the wilderness and into the land of Canaan. Note that before this transition they had kept the Passover- the remembrance that God had saved them in Egypt, had made them into a people, and then had led them by flame and by cloud through the wilderness. The Exodus story is at

the heart of the Jewish faith. It is part of our faith, too, especially during this 40 day period of remembering Jesus in the wilderness following his baptism. The echoes are everywhere if you are alert to them

Paul in writing to the church at Corinth tells them that they are a new creation if they are in Christ. God desires to reconcile the world to God not counting our trespasses – our sins – against us. With belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior we have the opportunity to put down our old life and turn to a new life with Christ. We have the opportunity to be reconciled and to create a new life focused on Gospel values of love God and love Neighbor. God has entrusted this message of new life to those of us who are willing to live a life framed by those Gospel values. Once again God reaches out a hand to us. Will you accept that hand and live a new life?

In each of the readings today and you will see an emphasis on acknowledging our human failures and the necessity to repent. And you will also see God's forgiveness. There is much more in the readings than repentance and forgiveness and many sermons have been preached on other aspects of these lessons. For today, though, I want to focus on repentance and forgiveness.

The Psalm gives us a roadmap:

In verse 1: *Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sin is put away.* With God, when our sins are forgiven, they are truly gone. God doesn't raise them and throw them in our face the next time we mess up. That doesn't give us permission to intentionally repeat the same sins again and again! God hopes that we have learned from what we did and we will not repeat the same sin.

In verses 5 and 6: *Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my guilt. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.* Our own acknowledgment of our sins is a prerequisite to forgiveness. We don't need anybody else beating us up over our faults. Most of us do a pretty good job of that ourselves. But being honest with ourselves about our shortcomings is a necessary first step to forgiveness.

In verses 9 and 10: *I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you.* Our Scripture tells us what is right and how we should live. We do not need someone else telling us what to do or constraining us by myriad rules and regulations. Love God. Love neighbor- the rest is commentary said an ancient

Joshua 5: 9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21; Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

rabbi. It is true today. Live by those two commandments and you will live a life that pleases God. This is fundamental to our understanding: that God gave us reason and an ability to know ourselves and an ability to determine right from wrong. It doesn't mean we always get it right but rather it means that we cannot check our brains at the door. We cannot cry victim or woe is me every time something doesn't go the way we want it to. We are responsible for our choices and our actions, including the consequences that flow from those choices. God, however, through Scripture instructs us in how we should go.

Lent is a time set aside to reflect on our lives and to make amendment of life as necessary. It is a time to consider where we have missed the mark and to turn, once again, to focus upon Jesus as the one God sent to show us what a life truly loving God and loving neighbor can look like. It is a time for us to be reconciled to God and to each other.

In the Episcopal Church, we have a Rite of Reconciliation rather informally called Confession.¹ Our Prayer Book reminds us that this ministry of reconciliation is exercised by the care each Christian has for others through the common prayer of Christians assembled for public worship and through its ministers declaring absolution. Each time we say the Confession, we are corporately acknowledging the places and time and ways in which we have fallen short both in things we have done and things we have left undone. This Rite of Reconciliation is a means of grace by which we restore our relationship with God and with each other. Grace is God's favor towards us, unearned and undeserved. In our Catechism we are told that by grace God forgives our sins, enlightens our minds, stirs our hearts and strengthens our wills.

The Rite of Reconciliation is one that "none must, some should, and all may" request. It is not limited to times of sickness but may be requested at any time by any one. Lent is an especially appropriate time for this Rite. I invite you this morning to turn in your Prayer Books to page 449 and let us partake, together, of this sacramental rite which offers us grace and amendment of life.

I will read the sections noted as "Priest" and I invite you to read out loud the portions noted as "Penitent." When we come to the naming of particular sins, please name them silently.

(BPC p. 449-451)

¹ Much of the following is based upon the Book of Common Prayer, p. 446 et seq and the Catechism, p. 861, 858.