

**PENTECOST:
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 16

August 23, 2009

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Psalm 34:15-22

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:56-69

A Universal Condition

In our postmodern world of pluralities, “universals” have become incredibly culturally specific. Universal truth or universal truths have become exposed as power rhetoric at worst, and dogma at best. I must admit that I am squarely in the postmodern camp, but there seems to me to be at least one (or two, as you’ll see) overarching and pervading universal human experience: pain. I hate to be so gloomy in my “universals” but I cannot deny the fact that in every country that I’ve ever visited, I have witnessed or experienced pain, suffering, grief, trauma or whatever one cares to label it. At some point, pain will undoubtedly make its way into our lived experience.

The lectionary texts today all deal with this aspect of life in one way or another. Joshua’s iconic statement “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (24:15b, *RSV*) comes in the middle of a litany of examples where life was difficult for the Hebrew people and how God’s presence helped them through it. Peter’s confession in John 6 is no less a statement of belief in a time of difficulty: “We have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (6:69, *RSV*). Peter makes this affirmation just after many disciples chose to abandon following Jesus because his teachings were simply too hard to swallow! The Ephesians passage highlights the “Armor of God” because the author knows all too well how difficult life is: “I am an ambassador in chains” (6:20a, *RSV*), he tells us. Finally, the psalmist gives us beauty in written form: “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit” (34:18, *RSV*).

In every passage, there is an unstated assumption that life and pain are old companions, and this assumption compels each writer to emphatically acknowledge another universal (at least one that I will dogmatically affirm): that God is never absent when pain is present. God does not abandon us in our time of difficulty. God’s presence in the here and now, no matter what difficulty we face, is the bedrock on which our eternal hope is built.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by the Rev. K. Jason Coker, an ordained minister with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Rev. Coker serves as pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Connecticut. Visit www.wiltonbaptist.org to learn more about the ministries of Wilton Baptist Church.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Kenya – With thanks to God for protecting the country during political instability, for the launch of the New Gikuyu Bible, for the “Upper Hill Project,” a property development project to generate resources for Bible work, and for the completion of the Somali Bible, and with prayers that the distribution of the Scriptures will bring healing and reconciliation, for missionaries serving in Somalia, and for the recording of the Somali New Testament in audio format; **Tanzania** – With thanks to God for the growing number of *Faith Comes By Hearing* listening groups, literacy classes, and HIV and AIDS workshops, and with prayers for the expansion of a Scripture distribution network, especially in remote areas, and for peace and for the government’s efforts to fight corruption.

Activity Corner: “Words of Eternal Life” Poster

Supplies needed: Bible; newsprint or poster board; marker; pens or pencils; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper (assorted colors); pattern in the shape of a slice of bread; cross cut out from 8-1/2” x 11” brown construction paper; scissors; glue or paste.

This week concludes the reading of John 6 (the Gospel texts for the past five weeks have been from this chapter and have focused on Jesus as the “Bread of Life”). Across the top of a sheet of newsprint or poster board, write JESUS SAID: I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE and affix the paper cross in the center of the sheet. Read through the entire sixth chapter of John’s Gospel and note all the verses that quote Jesus speaking “words of eternal life.” Distribute sheets of construction paper and invite each member of your household to trace and cut out a “slice of bread.” On each slice, ask them to write one of the verses from John 6 where Jesus speaks “words of eternal life.” Then affix each slice of bread to the poster so that they surround the cross. Conclude with a prayer that incorporates these “words of eternal life,” thanking Jesus for being our “Bread of Life,” and by singing “Wonderful Words of Life” or one of your favorite praise hymns.