

Lent 2



Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, it is your glory always to have mercy. Bring back all who have erred and strayed from your ways; lead them again to embrace in faith the truth of your Word and to hold it fast; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

{1} After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." {2} But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" {3} And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." {4} But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." {5} He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." {6} And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. {7} Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." {8} But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" {9} He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." {10} He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. {11} And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. {12} As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.... {17} When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. {18} On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

1. the word of the Lord came: This is a prophetic formula which is used only here and in verse 4 in the book of Genesis. It views the communication by God as a kind of prophetic "call."

in a vision: The only other vision in the Pentateuch is Balaam's vision in Numbers 24:4.

I am your shield: "The metaphor of God as 'shield' derives from the language of cult (Ps. 3.3; 28.7; 33.20). In the stock of patriarchal promises that occur again and again, this expression too occurs only here." [1]

your reward shall be very great: "reward" "is not used in the sense of a divine *quid pro quo*, for in the course of the narrative Abraham's testing comes first.... The gift is...first of all the innumerable posterity (v. 5)." [2]

1b-5: Abram complains that Yahweh has not fulfilled his promise of posterity (Genesis 12:1-3), and that Eliezer is his heir. (Eliezer is not mentioned again in the Pentateuch.) Yahweh responds by promising that Abram's heir will be his own child, and that his descendants will be as many as the stars.

6. he believed...reckoned it to him as righteousness: "Belief is an act of trust, a consent to God's plans in history.... Abraham's righteousness is...transferred to the realm of God's free and personal relationship to Abraham.... his righteousness is not the result of any

accomplishments... It is stated programmatically that belief alone has brought Abraham into a proper relationship to God." [3]

9-12, 17-18: The ritual of covenant making between Yahweh and Abram is described. "When the animals are halved and laid opposite each other, and when the partners to the covenant stride through the lane that has been thus formed, they express thereby a curse upon themselves in the event the covenant is broken." [4]

[13-16: These verses are an insertion that interrupts the description of the covenant making which foreshadows the fulfillment of the covenant promises, with references to the Exodus.]

Comment: The story of the patriarchs begins in chapter 12 with the promise made to Abraham in Ur, and unfolds through chapter 25 with many twists and turnings. Each of the individual episodes has both its own significance as well as a part in the larger story. In the lectionary all the first lessons for Lent 2 are taken from this story, Genesis 12:1-4a in year A, 17:1-7, 15-16 in year B, and 15:1-12, 17-18 this year. The purpose in all three is to establish God's covenant with Israel which will be fulfilled in Christ.

Psalm 27

{1} The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? {2} When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh-- my adversaries and foes-- they shall stumble and fall. {3} Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. {4} One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. {5} For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. {6} Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. {7} Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! {8} "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek. {9} Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! {10} If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up. {11} Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. {12} Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. {13} I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. {14} Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

1. *The Lord is my light:* "According to Isa. 10:17; 60:1, there was in Jerusalem a traditional designation of Yahweh as [*or Yisrael*, "Light of Israel"]." The parallel, salvation, fills the designation with its content. The sentence structure is like that of Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd."

2-4: The psalmist declares his/her confidence that Yahweh will protect him/her against adversaries and evildoers. Yahweh hide and protect the singer in times of troubles.

4. *One thing I asked of the LORD:* Cf. 1 Kings 3:5; The singer in Psalm 27 has modeled his/her desire on that of Solomon who asked for wisdom to govern God's people.

to live in the house of the Lord: The psalmist desires to live in the Temple

5-6. The Lord hides and protects, and exalts the singer over his/her enemies.

his tent: Old tradition held that on earth Yahweh dwelt in a tent. 2 Samuel 6:1-17 recount David bringing the tent into Jerusalem. When Solomon built the Temple the cult objects in the tent-tabernacle were transferred to the Temple. The tent and the Temple were places of refuge.

7-13. "...vv. 7-14 everywhere give evidence of elements of an individual lament." [5] The

singer pleads with Yahweh to respond to his/her need and not ignore or forsake him/her.

13. I believe: Like Abraham the singer declares his/her confidence in the promises of Yahweh to protect and sustain him/her "in the land of the living," that is, during his/her life. See also Psalm 142:3-4. "For the Christian believers, the land of the living in which they believe they will see the goodness of the Lord is the 'commonwealth of heaven' of which the epistle speaks." [6]

14: The psalmist admonishes those who witness his/her liturgical act in reciting the Psalm in the Temple to be courageous and wait for Yahweh's intervention in their own needs.

Comment: The Psalm is offered as an appropriate response by Abraham, or anyone who responds to God's promises in faith. Technically, the Psalms is divided at verse 7, between verses 1-6, an individual song of trust and verses 7-14, a personal lament. Both stress the singers trust in Yahweh to save him/her.

Philippians 3:17-4:1

{17} Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. *{18}* For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. *{19}* Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. *{20}* But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. *{21}* He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. *{4:1}* Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Paul "begins to say his farewells (iii.1); but stops to add a direct appeal to the two women who have been the centres (sic) of disunity in the Philippian community; and he invites a 'true comrade' to help them compose their differences (iv.2-3). Within this appeal, the editor of the correspondence has interpolated the fragment iii.2-iv.1." [7] Beare characterizes the passage 3:17-4:1 as "A warning against self-indulgence." [8] Paul "has spoken of the danger of legalism, and of a righteousness based on the Law; now he turns to the danger of antinomianism, the casting aside of all restraints, the degeneration of freedom into license." [9]

17-19. join in imitating me: To imitate: 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Colossians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; Hebrews 6:12. Paul sets out two possible examples for the Philippians to follow: himself and the "enemies of the cross of Christ," whom he characterizes in verse 19 as those whose "minds are set on earthly things."

20: Paul characterizes his own example as that of one whose "citizenship is in heaven."

21. transform...conform: Here conform and transform are complements, or possibly even two successive steps in the process of sanctification. In Romans 12:2 they are opposites or two successive steps toward the same goal, with only conformation being an appropriate Christian goal.

body of our humiliation...body of his glory: Our bodies are flesh and blood, and cannot inherit the kingdom. God will raise up bodies as he chooses, spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-53). "body of his glory:" See especially 1 Corinthians 15:40-43.

make all things subject to himself: The power by which Jesus can effect a change in the nature of the believer is his power of universal creation and subjection. "Christ will *likewise* subject 'all things' to himself, including the emperor himself and all those who in his name are causing the Philippians to suffer." [10]

Luke 13:31-35

{31} At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for

Herod wants to kill you." {32} He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. {33} Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' {34} Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! {35} See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

31. some Pharisees...said to him, "Get away from here...": The Pharisees may be acting for Herod, or to discredit Jesus by provoking him to play the coward. Fitzmyer suggests another alternative: "One must recall that for Luke Christianity in the long run is a logical sequel to Pharisaic Judaism.... Pharisees appear here not as antagonists of Jesus but as friends." [11]

31-33. Herod wants to kill you: Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee (3:1) .Jesus dismisses Herod as a fox, declares his intention to go to Jerusalem, because prophets are killed in Jerusalem.

I must be on my way: The Greek here is *dei*, "it is necessary." This is not a casual necessity, but one woven into the very fabric of Jesus' being on earth. "It is required of who and what I am that I should be on my way." To fail to meet the demands of this necessity would be to submit to the temptation of expediency the devil offered to Jesus after his baptism, and would hopelessly compromise what God intended in Christ.

it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem: Jesus has nothing to fear from Herod, for it is "impossible" that he, a prophet, should die outside of Jerusalem. The idea may have been based on the story of King Manasseh, whom Josephus (*Ant.* 10:3,1 § 38) said, "He spared not even the prophets, some of whom he slaughtered daily, so that Jerusalem ran with blood." We should also remember "the departure, which he was about to make at Jerusalem," which was the subject of the conversation Jesus had with Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:30-31).

34. Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets: See Luke 11:49-51, a wisdom saying concerning the behavior of Jerusalem toward God's messengers.

I [have] desired to gather your children...you were not willing: Jesus expresses his concern to bring the Gospel to Jerusalem and find the kind of response Jonah found in Nineveh, but he knows he will be rejected.

35. your house is left to you: Better, "your house is abandoned!" Probably an allusion to Jeremiah 22:5. "house" may be the Temple.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord: Psalm 118:26 (LXX). The quotation is also used in Luke 19:38. The verse "was chanted by the people of Jerusalem as a greeting to pilgrims coming to the city for the celebration of the feast days, especially Passover." [12]

Reflection

The Prayer of the Day suggests the theme for the day is "to embrace in faith the truth of your Word and to hold it fast." Abraham is identified as one who did that, who believed the Lord, and his faith was reckoned as righteousness.

Last Sunday Jesus was tempted to proclaim his Sonship through means that would draw people to him. Instead he chose the way of the cross, the way of conflict and confrontation. Jesus was governed by divine plan, not by human expediency. He left Galilee, not because of the warning of the Pharisees but because he *must* go to Jerusalem to die.

The Church also has to choose between expediency and confrontation, between conforming to the ways of the world and being governed by God's plan. So, too, the individual Christian.

In the final analysis what is done depends on how we view the nature of God, the purpose of the Church, the goal of the Christian life. If God's purpose is to make us happy and comfortable and successful in this life, if the Church is to cater to human ideas and ideals, if the Christian life is to be one of self-satisfaction and self-indulgence, then the expedient road will be walked. If God and the Church and the Christian are seen to be at war with the world, the temptations of the flesh, and the wiles of the devil, then the only way is confrontation, conflict, death and resurrection, the way of the Cross.

Hymns [13]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

32 --E--Fling Wide the	526 --P--Immortal, Invisible
421 --D--Lord Christ, When	741v --G--Thy Holy Wings
544 --I--The God of	663v --G--When Twilight
703s --P--Psalm 27: The	427, 496, 424, 401, 101

Prayers of the People [14]

P or A: We pray with confidence to God through whom all things are made possible. We pray in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and respond, "**Amen.**"

A: We were numbered among the multitude of stars shown to Abraham, and blessed by being living witnesses of your promise to create a heavenly family. Give us the faith of your servant Abraham, so that we too may believe the unbelievable that you promise, especially the promise of life from death. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: Help us to follow the message of your gospel. Strengthen us to resist settling into comfortable patterns of living, and encourage us instead to reach out to the world in ministries of healing, teaching, and serving. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For the sick and the dying we pray to you, compassionate God. We remember especially _____ . In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: Enable this congregation to stand firm in your word, with hearts focused upon fulfilling your will. Especially do we pray for our Sunday School teachers, that they may instill in our children zeal for your kingdom of justice and peace and confidence in your great love for them. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: Though your face may seem hidden from us at times, lost in the shadows of the sin and greed of this world, enlighten our hearts and minds with a sense of your presence, and lift our eyes to behold the bright stars in your sky. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

P: In you, O Lord, as your faithful servant Abraham believed, all things are indeed possible. We commend our prayers to you, trusting in your power to transform fears into hope and sadness into joy. We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Or [15]

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God who gathers all the holy children for the paschal feast.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, and for all the holy people of God.

For NN our catechumen(s) and NN their sponsors(s).

For the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, for all who share God's covenant, and for all the peoples of the earth.

For all who are oppressed, afflicted, or in despair.

For the dying and the dead, and for those who mourn.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need. Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, N, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

Blessed are you, God of our ancestors, who sent your Son to die for our sins. Receive the prayers we offer this day and prepare us to take up our citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

[1] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1956, p. 178.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

[5] Albrecht Alt, "Jesaja 8,23-9,6. Befreiungsnacht und Kronungstag," Festschrift Alfred Betholet, *Tübingen*, 1950, 29ff.

[6] Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1974, pp. 3-4.

[7] F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959, p. 27.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 134.

[10] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995, p. 384.

[11] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of Luke (X-XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985, p. 1030.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 1037.

[13] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[14] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[15] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>