

Easter 3



Prayer of the Day

O God, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world, rescuing us from the hopelessness of death. Grant your faithful people a share in the joys that are eternal; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

This prayer was composed in 1549, and based on the traditional Epistle (1 Peter 2:21-25), for the Book of Common Prayer.

Acts 9:1-6 [7-20]

{1} Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest {2} and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. {3} Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. {4} He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" {5} He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. {6} But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." [7] The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. {8} Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. {9} For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. {10} Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." {11} The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, {12} and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." {13} But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; {14} and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." {15} But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; {16} I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." {17} So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." {18} And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, {19} and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, {20} and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."]

1. *high priest*: The high priest at this time was Caiaphas who served from 18-36 c.e. Acts 4:6 incorrectly identifies Annas who was high priest from 6-15 c.e. as the current high priest. Paul sought and received from the high priest in Jerusalem the authority to extradite Christian Jews in Damascus (cf. Acts 26:12).

2. *the Way*: A name for the Christian-Jewish community. Saul would have had no authority over non-Jews. In Acts 24:14 Paul describes his worship of his ancestral God as according to "the Way." "...there is no solid explanation of the origin of this unique usage, which in the NT is limited to Ac., and which found no immediate imitators in the period which followed." [1] In Acts 18:24-25 Apollos is described as "a Jew.... He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord."

3-8: The first description of Paul's Damascus experience. Two other descriptions are recorded in Acts 22:6, 9 and 26:13. Common to the descriptions is the question: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Paul's question, "Who are you, Lord?" And the reply, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Each of the descriptions has other details.

7. *The men who were traveling with me...heard the voice but saw no one:* In Acts 22:9 they saw the light but did not hear the voice. In Acts 26:10 f. it is clear that Damascus was not the first place Saul went in search of followers of the Way.

10. *a disciple in Damascus named Ananias:* This is neither the husband of Sapphira (Acts 5:1), nor the high priest (Acts 23:2), but a Christian Jew from Damascus.

17. *Ananias...laid his hands on Saul...And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and his sight was restored:* The restoration of Paul's sight is the evidence of God's acceptance which was necessary for his baptism.

18. *he...was baptized:* This is the only reference to Saul/Paul's baptism, although it may be referred to elliptically in 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3. It is interesting that not until Acts 13:9 that Saul is called Paul. The word *saulos* "also has a Greek application well recognized in the Hellenistic world, albeit generally ignored by commentators, being used to describe the loose and wanton gait of prostitutes....[Saul/Paul] would have seen that, as chief emissary to the Greeks of the One True Faith, he could not hope for a successful ministry if he sported a name like 'slut-arsed'." [2]

20. *He is the Son of God:* The content of Saul's preaching is to affirm the religious charge leveled against Jesus in Luke 22:70.

Psalm 30

{1} I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me. {2} O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. {3} O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. {4} Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. {5} For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. {6} As for me, I said in my prosperity, "I shall never be moved." {7} By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed. {8} To you, O LORD, I cried, and to the LORD I made supplication: {9} "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? {10} Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper!" {11} You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, {12} so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Psalm 30 is a song of thanksgiving of an individual. The title calls it "A Song at the dedication of the temple, which indicates that it was attached to the festival of Hanukkah.

1: The singer declares his/her intention to praise Yahweh for his intervention in the singer's misfortunes; his/her enemies have not rejoiced over him/her.

3. *soul:* The word is *nephesh*, the breath that sustains life. Here, by synecdoche, it encompasses life itself.

Sheol: The place of the dead. A "soulless, shadowy existence which is far, far removed from God." [3]

the Pit: "[*bor*] is a figurative expression that allows the concepts of grave and [*sheol*] to coincide." [4]

4: The exhortation to the "saints" to sing praises to Yahweh refers to the setting of the Psalm in the Temple where other worshippers witnessed the performance of the thanksgiving song (perhaps with more explicit details of both the singer's situation and Yahweh's help) and then joined in praising God for his help.

5: Time is relative to the activity which fills it. "Once Yahweh has granted help, the time in which God was angry, in which he 'hid his face' (v. 7) and let the psalmist suffer in the 'realm of death,' shrinks down to a brief moment (*rg*'), whereas the extension of grace fills and determines the duration of a lifetime (cf. Isa. 54:7-8)... Distress and weeping turn out to be events of yesterday, of the past. With the new morning, the point in time of Yahweh's intervention (cf. Ps. 46:5; 90:14; 143:8), jubilation breaks out as the spirit that determines the meaning of life henceforth. A person's relation to time is in the OT definitely

determined by his nearness to God (Ps. 84:10)." [5]

6-8. *I shall never be moved*: The singer describes his/her confidence, because of Yahweh's favor, and his/her dismay when Yahweh "hid his face," withdrew that favor. Complacency belongs to the fool (Proverbs 1:32). Though the singer had apparently done nothing wrong, Yahweh still withheld his support.

9. *What profit...tell of your faithfulness?*: "This unique motive for intervening presented to God in the plea reveals the psalmist's understanding of his life. The purpose of his existence is the praise of God. The only reason advanced for Yahweh's rescue...is that this praise should not be extinguished." [6]

12: The praise which would have been lost is now expressed, and the singer vows ongoing thanksgiving.

Revelation 5:11-14

{11} Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, {12} singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" {13} Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" {14} And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

11. angels...living creatures...elders: These are the personages gathered around the throne of God. "Angels, 1:20; "living creatures," 4:6-9; "elders," 4:4, 10-11.

12. worthy is the Lamb: The members of the heavenly court sing the answer to the question "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (Revelation 5:2).

13. every creature in heaven...on earth...under the earth...in the sea: In Revelation 5:3 "no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it," taken by "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, of the Root of Jesse," from the hand of "the one seated on the throne."

singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb": All earthly creatures glorify the Lord and the Lamb.

And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshipped: The four living creatures are described in Revelation 4:6-8; they are the cherubim and seraphim non-human created beings who carry Yahweh's throne and sing his praises (Ezekiel 10:20; Isaiah 6:2-3).

"This reads like a dramatization of the conclusion of the hymn in Phil 2:5-11, where in verse 10 it is said that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth' (cf. the enumeration of these categories of creatures in v 13a)." [7]

John 21:1-19

{1} After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. {2} Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. {3} Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. {4} Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. {5} Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." {6} He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. {7} That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. {8} But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. {9} When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. {10} Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." {11} So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them;

and though there were so many, the net was not torn. {12} Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. {13} Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. {14} This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. {15} When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." {16} A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." {17} He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. {18} Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." {19} (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

1: The verse is an editorial transition that is needed to reopen the Gospel after the colophon in 20:30-31. It was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection (verse 14).

2. *Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples*: One of the "two others" is the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (verse 7).

3. *Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you."* In the face of the incomprehensibility of everything that had happened the disciples turned to something with which they were familiar and accustomed.

4-7a: Jesus appears and tells them how to catch some fish. They do what he said and make a great catch. The Beloved Disciple identifies the unknown figure on the beach as "the Lord." The "disciple whom [Jesus] loved" appears in 19:26; 20:3; 21:7, 20.

7b-8: Peter dresses and jumps into the sea, the other disciples come ashore in the boat.

11. *a hundred fifty-three* [fish]: Some suggest that 153 is the number of fish known at that time, or the varieties of peoples. Others point out that it is the 17th triangular number, that is $1+2+3+\dots+17 = 153$, which is then assigned a meaning of perfection and completion.

the net was not torn: One of the differences with the similar story in Luke when a second boat was necessary to bring the catch to shore because, "their nets were beginning to break." It is clear that John has some reason for calling attention to the number of fish, because Jesus asked Peter to bring some of the fish they had caught (verse 10) though he already had fish cooking on a charcoal fire (verse 9).

13: The description of Jesus' serving bread and fish is similar to the feeding of the 5000 in John 6:11. Some see a eucharistic emphasis.

15-17: The three-fold question and three-fold answer. In the first two questions the verb *agapao*, "love" is used and Peter answers with the verb *phileo*, "love." In the last question both the question and answer use the verb *phileo*. Jesus and Peter would have been speaking in Aramaic where there is only one verb for the various kinds of love, so we should not make too much of the different Greek verbs. Even in Greek there is no real difference between *agapao* and *phileo* until much later. The three-fold repetition of the question may be a reflection of Peter's triple denial. "It is not merely a private scene, but a public, ritual scene, the threefold character of which is conceived as a counterpart to the threefold denial of Peter.... It has to do...with the fact that Peter forfeited his prerogative to lead the community of Jesus by his threefold denial. Now, however, he is again expressly acknowledged as that leader.... as the leader of the Jerusalem community, which was orphaned by Jesus' death." [8]

18-19: Jesus' picture of what will happen when Peter is old: "you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish

to go" is explained as an indication of "the kind of death by which he would glorify God." However, there is no explicit explanation of "the kind of death" that is illustrated by this picture.

Though the reading ends here, the chapter goes on for several verses in which Peter calls attention to the Beloved Disciple, asks what his fate is to be, and is told to mind his own business. The second to the last verse implies that the Beloved Disciple as the author of the Gospel.

Reflection

The central focus of the Gospel is the three-fold question to Peter, "Do you love me," and the three-fold admonition, "feed/tend my sheep/lambs." The chapter, though not the reading, ends with a prophecy concerning the Beloved Disciple and the identification of that disciple as the author of the Gospel. "Believing in Jesus" is not a gift given for its own sake, but it is intended to enable us not only to love Jesus but to love and care for those who are still outside the sheep-fold.

In the first lesson Ananias is required by God to baptize Saul, an enemy of the early church. In a similar fashion we may be called on to love our enemies as Jesus taught us to do. God will not let us be overwhelmed if we dare to follow his leading.

The reading from Revelation is part of a larger context which deals with John's vision of the investiture of the Lamb. "The entire chapter is dominated by the heavenly liturgy consisting of the two hymns of praise found in 5:2, 9-10; 5:12, the doxology in 5:13, and the amen in 5:14." The Lamb is worthy, and he receives power and wealth and wisdom, might and honor and glory and blessing both from many angels and from all creation. There is a connection between this lesson and the Gospel in the use of the imagery of the lambs.

Hymns [9]

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

146 --E--Rejoice, Angelic

Choirs,

140 --D--With High Delight

143 --D--Now All the

177 --I--By All Your

319 --P--Oh, Sing, My791v --II--Alabar,

(826s)

789v --II--Now the Feast

696v --G--I've Just Come from

525, 711s, 210, 141

Prayers of the People [10]

P or A: The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ both humbles us and lifts us up to rejoice in God's love for His people. With great celebration, we pray "Christ is risen!" and respond "Christ is risen indeed!"

A: God of paradox, you work in mysterious ways, calling those who have persecuted your people to profess the gospel, and transforming death into the passage to new life. Open our hearts to your mysterious ways, and grant us wisdom to discern your will. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of grace, your anger lasts but a moment, and your favor endures a lifetime. You punish to the third and fourth generation, but grant your blessing to the thousandth. We humbly thank you for your mercy, and take a moment of silence to repent of our sinful ways, trusting in your compassion. (silence) Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of righteousness, you alone are without sin. You sent your innocent Son to die for our iniquities. We praise you for the gift of Jesus Christ, in whom we see the boundless

grace and love which draws us to you. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of the weak, you bring comfort and peace to those who suffer. Be with the sick and the dying, especially those whose names we bring before you now: _____. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of community, as the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples to break bread with them, so share yourself with us in the Holy Communion. Prepare our hearts to meet you in the Eucharist, and encourage us to welcome the stranger to your table, even as you welcome us. Christ is risen! Christ...

P: With humility and great joy we lift up our prayers to a loving God whose grace covers all of our sin. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Or [11]

Presider or deacon

Called by the risen Christ to love and follow the Lord, let us pray to God for the needs of all believers and of all peoples everywhere.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy churches in every place, and for the unity of all.

For this holy assembly and for all who gather in Christ.

For *NN* and all illumined by the light of Christ.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For the world and its leaders, our nation and its people.

For all those in danger and need, the sick, the suffering, and the oppressed, and for all the dead.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Remembering our most glorious and 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, Lord of glory, and blessed is the Lamb who was slain. Hear our prayers which we offer this day, and raise us with him to your throne in heaven. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

[1] Wilhelm Michaelis, [*hodos*, Way], *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. by Gerhard Friedrich). Grand Rapids, Michigan Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Vol. V., 1968, p. 90.

[2] T. J. Leary, "Paul's Improper Name," *New Testament Studies*, 38(1992)468-469.

[3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 162.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 355.

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 356.

[7] David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*. Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1997, p. 367.

[8] Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, p. 216.

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

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

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