

Epiphany 5

[Home](#) [Up](#)

February 9, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you sent your only Son as the Word of life for our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Help us to believe with joy what the Scriptures proclaim, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Isaiah 40:21-31

{21} Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? {22} It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; {23} who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. {24} Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. {25} To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. {26} Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. {27} Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? {28} Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. {29} He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. {30} Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; {31} but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

21-22. Have you not known...heard...It is he...: The question is posed in verse 18: "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" Yahweh sits above the circle of the earth and stretches out the earth like a curtain, and controls the affairs of people on earth.

22. its inhabitants are like grasshoppers: All living creatures, including human beings, are trivial. It is Yahweh, who has created the heavens and earth, who is powerful.

24. when he blows upon them: In Isaiah 40:7 the people are likened to grass which withers when the wind blows on it. The kings of the earth wither when Yahweh blows on them. There is a connection here with both Genesis 1:2 and with John 3. The wind of God is powerful, and we know it by its effects.

25: The question of verse 18 is repeated, this time with a stress on "will."

26: The stars are the evidence of the power of Yahweh. He has created them, given them names and preserves them. Even the stars are subordinate to the power of God. Of course, stars do go nova and die, but for the naked-eye observer this would not have been known.

27. Why do you say... "My way is hidden from the Lord: Do the people really think they can hide their actions from the one who withers the rulers of the earth with his breath, and calls the stars by name?

28-31: The word "faint" occurs four times in these verses, and "weary," three times. Those who depend on Yahweh will be like him. Those whom he "bore on eagles' wings" (Exodus 19:4), will "mount up with wings like eagles." Two who were "swifter than eagles" were Jonathan and David (2 Samuel 1:23).

Yahweh cannot be compared to anything or anyone. An idol is the work of a craftsman, but God is not a powerless image. The one who sits in the heavens has all power. We recognize his majesty as we contemplate the creation. Yahweh's power and wisdom will not fail. He will empower his people.

Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

{1} Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting. {2} The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. {3} He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. {4} He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. {5} Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. {6} The LORD lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground. {7} Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre. {8} He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills. {9} He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry. {10} His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner; {11} but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.... {20}...Praise the LORD!

1, 20: The Great Hallel includes Psalms 145-150, each of which begins and ends with "Praise the Lord!" (*Hallelujah* in Hebrew).

2. *The Lord builds up Jerusalem*: "The statements in vv. 2 and 13 could permit the deduction that the psalm originated after the completion of the building of the walls by Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 12:27ff... (Gk [Septuagint], incidentally, connects Psalm 147 with Haggai and Zechariah and obviously thinks of the rebuilding of the temple.) [1]

3, 6, 9: Yahweh cares for the outcasts and oppressed. Even animals receive their food from him.

4: This verse makes an explicit connection with the first lesson, Isaiah 40:26.

11: Yahweh does not take pleasure in the strength of humans or animals. His pleasure is in those who revere him and who put their confidence in his covenant mercy (steadfast love).

The Psalm is an appropriate response to the first lesson, praising Yahweh for his graciousness to the people of Israel, and to his power and majesty in creation.

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

{16} If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! {17} For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. {18} What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel. {19} For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. {20} To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. {21} To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. {22} To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. {23} I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

16. *ground for boasting...obligation*: Paul defends his willingness not to exercise his spiritual freedom, or to claim for himself rights and privileges to which he is entitled.

17-18: Doing something by choice or by commission is contrasted.

19: Proclaiming the Gospel gives him no ground for boasting; his reward for doing so is making the Gospel free of charge.

20: He seeks to take on the characteristics of those to whom he brings the Gospel. He has "become all things to all people," and he does it in order to share the blessings of the Gospel. The history of the church has been the opposite of this. Generally, we seek

to have others take on our characteristics. Exceptions to this practice stand out as unusual. Of course, Mother Teresa stands out in our time as a clear example, as does Mohandas Gandhi.

23. *so that I may share in its blessings*: The issue is not that certain actions are required to share the blessings, but that the blessings will produce a quality of action.

Mark 1:29-39

{29} As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. {30} Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. {31} He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. {32} That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. {33} And the whole city was gathered around the door. {34} And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. {35} In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. {36} And Simon and his companions hunted for him. {37} When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." {38} He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." {39} And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

29. *As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew*: In Capernaum a synagogue has been excavated near a Christian church which, according to tradition, was built on the site of Peter's house.

Simon's mother-in-law: Paul refers to Cephas' wife as a believer (2 Corinthians 9:5).

31: The healing is marked by touch. "After she is healed, she is restored to her place in the family and resumes her role there, an important aspect of healing episodes." [2]

32. *That evening at sundown*: "Mark provides careful note that the healings occurred after sunset, that is, after the sabbath had ended." [3]

demons: Demons (in Greek) are the same as unclean spirits (in Hebrew) (see Mark 7:25-26). They are non-human creatures, beyond human control, who could cause deviant or threatening effects among human beings. Because he is the Holy One of God Jesus has authority over them, and both casts them out of their human hosts and silences them.

34. *he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him*: This is the second occurrence of the secrecy motif in Mark. The demon in 1:24 also recognized him and was silenced by Jesus.

35. *In the morning, while it was still very dark*: The previous day was a sabbath. This is very early on the first day of the week while it was dark. There is similarity between this description and that of the conditions when the women went to Jesus' tomb.

he prayed: Almost certainly his prayers would have included the *Shema*, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4), the fundamental confession of Israel. Luke omits this reference to Jesus praying.

38. *that is what I came out to do*: See Luke 4:43. The setting is somewhat different, but the point is the same. Jesus will not domesticate his mission by remaining in any one place.

Reflection

In the Prayer of the Day we pray. "Help us to believe with joy what the Scriptures proclaim." God is great in strength, might and power. He is the Creator of all things, and he strengthens the weak and powerless. His pleasure is not in our wisdom, skill or might, but in our reliance on his steadfast love. When we put our trust in him, we have no ground for conceit, for all we do is done in his name and by his strength.

In the first lesson we are reminded how insignificant we really are, like

grasshoppers. Even the rulers of the earth are of little consequence. We praise God for his steadfast love. As we serve him we reach out to those around us, especially to those who are different from us, and we show God's love for them but becoming like them. Jesus is the word of life, and we seek to emulate him. We are never satisfied that we have done enough, but we continue to reach out to others with the Gospel of God's love in Christ.[4]

Hymns

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

393 E Rise, Shine, You
360 D O Christ, the
723s I Arise, Your Light
(652v)

431 P Your Hand, O,
390 II I Love to Tell
232 G Your Word, O
87, 385

Prayers of the People [5]

A: Let us pray for those who delight in the law of the Lord, and for all people according to their needs.

A: O God, your Son comes to bring meaning to a world filled with hardship and pain. Make your church an agent of hope and healing. Lord, in your mercy, C: hear our prayer.

A: O God, you called Paul to proclaim the gospel to people of different cultures. Give us skills to proclaim your word and celebrate the sacraments that all people may hear the invitation of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy, C: hear our prayer.

A: O God, your son felt the need to be apart for prayer and renewal. Teach us to pray, and give us strength to proclaim the message of the kingdom in the world. Lord, in your mercy, C: hear our prayer.

A: O God, your Son is called Prince of Peace. Strengthen those who follow him with the spirit of justice and clothe them with concern for peace. Lord, in your mercy, C: hear our prayer.

A: O God, your Son's proclamation was coupled with his miracles of healing. Make our witness open to the world's misery: unconsolated grief, undue imprisonment, unjust accusation, unending pain. Help us speak the word of healing. (We pray especially...). Lord, in your mercy, C: hear our prayer.

A: O God, through the examples of Isaiah and the apostles, fill our lives with meaning and purpose, and let all who call on you be included in the heavenly throng. Lord, in your mercy, C: hear our prayer.

P: Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OR [6]

Let us pray for all peoples in the church and the world who need mercy, justice, and peace.

Deacon or other leader

For the church of God, and for all who witness to the glory of God.

For this world and for the sharing of health and healing.

For those stigmatized as unclean, and for those who touch and heal them.

For all who practice the medical arts, and for physicians of the spirit. For all who are sick and in need of prayer, and for the dying and the dead.

Presider

God, who sends us to wash in the river of healing, hear the prayers we offer you this day and enable us to proclaim your good news and spread the word of your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] Han-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 59-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 556.

[2] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 181.

[3] *Loc. cit.*

[4] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

[5] "Lessons & Prayers," Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. Volume 2, Number 2, February 6, 1994.

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