

# Proper 10

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## Pentecost 8 July 14, 2002

### Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Isaiah 55:10-13

{10} For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, {11} so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. {12} For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. {13} Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This is the last pericope in Deutero-Isaiah. It is similar to the first pericope in the unit in its description of the change of nature from harsh to fruitful as the result of Yahweh's power and mercy.

Yahweh's word is certain and powerful. Like rain and snow that water the earth so that seeds may sprout and grow, God's word will accomplish its purpose to return the exiles back to their homes in peace. Their return shall be an everlasting memorial to the power of Yahweh's word.

### Psalm 65:[1-8] 9-13

{1} Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, {2} O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come. {3} When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions. {4} Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple. {5} By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. {6} By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. {7} You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. {8} Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy. [{9} You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. {10} You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. {11} You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. {12} The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, {13} the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.]

[1-8: Yahweh forgives his people and delivers them. His power is described in terms of creative activity.]

9-13: The connection between the Psalm and the first lesson is in the image of water in both. Water appears in both texts as instrumental in producing a rich harvest.

The gateways of the morning and evening, the hills and the valleys, all sing and shout for joy because of Yahweh's might and mercy.

## Romans 8:1-11

{1} There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. {2} For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. {3} For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, {4} so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. {5} For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. {6} To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. {7} For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law--indeed it cannot, {8} and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. {9} But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. {10} But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. {11} If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

*4. the just requirement of the law...who walk according to the Spirit:* The law cannot be fulfilled "in the flesh," in fact the flesh is weakened by the law. However, those who walk "according to the Spirit" fulfill the requirement of the law, that is "the status of uprightness before God's tribunal....what the law ideally required." [1]

*5-8. does not submit to God's law...cannot please God:* Those whose lives are motivated and powered by earthly goals and passions, no matter how "good" they may be, are in opposition to God. Death is the consequence.

*9-11. But you:* Second person, plural: "you all." Paul is not addressing the individual, but the Christian community in Rome. You all are not in the flesh...you all are in the Spirit...the Spirit of God dwells in you...Christ is in you...his Spirit...dwells in you. The Christian community is filled with the Spirit of Christ, and has life, even though the body may die, metaphorically and also literally by anticipation.

## Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

{1} That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. {2} Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. {3} And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. {4} And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. {5} Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. {6} But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. {7} Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. {8} Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. {9} Let anyone with ears listen!".... {18} "Hear then the parable of the sower. {19} When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. {20} As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; {21} yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. {22} As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. {23} But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Parallels: Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-11.

*1. the house:* This passage is parallel with Mark 4:1ff, where Jesus has been in his own home in Capernaum (Matthew 4:13) on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He re-enters "the house" in 13:36, though it is not said that it is the same house.

*2-9:* The parable of the sower or soils (depending on whether you emphasize the parable itself, or the interpretation) describes the development of the church in terms of the agricultural process in first century Palestine. "In the setting of Jesus, it is simply a story about peasant farmers.... In the scenario, the seeds were sown before the land was plowed, as was customary; however, the sowing was carelessly done. Hence the sower might have been assumed by peasant hearers to be a small landholder and viewed negatively. But if that were the case, the parable seems to lose its

point. If a hired laborer or tenant farmer struggling with hostile conditions were imagined, hence viewed sympathetically, the connection to God as generous provider would be seen as good news. The impossible yields described in v. 8 are typical of the fantastic exaggerations typical of peasant stories as well as Jesus' parables. Recent research suggests that a yield four to at most five times the amount of seed used would be normal." [2]

4, 19. *birds...evil one*: 1 Kings 14:7-11, 1 Kings 16:1-4.

8. *a hundredfold*: Isaac, Abraham's son, settled in Gerar during a famine. He planted seed, and *in the same year reaped a hundredfold*. He prospered and became wealthy in the midst of others who suffered famine (Genesis 26:12). Isaac's fantastic harvest is an indication of God's favor and an insult to the Philistines among whom Isaac was living. Human labor could not produce such a harvest. In fact, Jesus point out, human labor is beset by birds and rock, heat and weeds, and will often fall far short of need. "...the phrases drawn from the tradition [the Old Testament] are given in cryptic bits and pieces, yet they do not need to be filled in because the audience knows how to finish each piece cited." [3]

9. *Let anyone with ears listen!* Besides the obvious meaning, there is also a less obvious meaning, which the disciples are challenged to discover.

10-17: "When asked why he speaks in parables, Jesus indicates that they are insider language." [4] The omission of these verses changes the impact of the story somewhat. The determinism of these verses and the elevation of the disciples' situation are omitted.

13: Isaiah 6:9-10, Septuagint version.

18-23: Jesus explains the meaning of the story. The explanation is developed as an allegory in which each type of soil is identified as a type of hearer. The rich harvest comes from the good soil, and it is "the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit."

## Reflection

After developing the theme of justification and reconciliation announced in Romans 5:1-11 in terms of freedom from death, from self and from the law, the Christian life is now described as a life empowered by the Spirit to be about the business of the Spirit.

The "central lesson [of the Gospel] is that 'the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus will not be established without many serious failures.'" [5] The final success of the kingdom is assured. The goodness of the good soil is not an innate characteristic of some who hear, but is the quality of what they produce. Those who hear and understand God's word will bear a fantastic harvest, which will wipe out all the loses caused by the deficiencies of the other soils.

God has chosen us and planted his Word in us. We pray that he will enlighten us through his Holy Spirit, that we may receive it, understand it, and growing in faith, hope and love, may live according to us. So, God's kingdom indeed comes of itself. We pray that it may come also to us, and through us, to others. The life of the Christian is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit human beings are destined for death, even the "good" ones. The church faces many difficulties as those who are called move between their earthly empowerment which leads to death, and the empowerment of the Spirit which leads to life. But the future of the church is assured. God has given his word, and it will not fail. God waters the earth and causes the crops to grow. Likewise, God alone insures the richness and vitality of the kingdom. "Let anyone with ears listen!"

## Hymns [6]

*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

250 E--Open Now Thy

234 D--Almighty God, Your

237 P--O God of Light

297 II--Salvation unto Us

236 G--When Seed Falls

261, 231, 221, 821s

### Prayers of the People [7]

A: God of love, you do not worry whether soil is fertile or rocky, you simply sow. Give us sufficient freedom from self-concern that we too might give freely regardless of another's deservedness. To you we pray saying, "Good and faithful God," and respond "Hear our prayer."

A: That the church might be first to welcome those rejected by society, let us pray saying, good and faithful God, C: Hear our prayer.

A: That those who struggle to accept people on welfare might themselves never know poverty. Let us pray saying, good and faithful God, C: Hear our prayer.

A: That those who are fearful of the future might find peace in Jesus Christ, let us pray saying, good and faithful God, C: Hear our prayer.

A: That the members of this parish might be worthy custodians of the earth and its resources, let us pray saying, good and faithful God, C: Hear our prayer.

A: That those who seek baptism in this place might serve Christ without hesitation, let us pray saying, good and faithful God, C: Hear our prayer.

A: That the bread and cup we share might strengthen us all for service in the world, let us pray saying, good and faithful God, C: Hear our prayer.

P: Freely have we received, O Lord, freely now may we give. For the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Or [8]

*Presider or deacon*

As the Word goes forth from the mouth of God, let us turn our hearts to those in need and offer prayers for all peoples in every place.

*Deacon or other leader*

For N our bishop and N our presbyter, for this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

For farmers and a good harvest, for those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For all who thirst and hunger: the sick and the dying, the poor and the oppressed, travelers and prisoners, and for their families.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

For ourselves, our families, our companions, and all those we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, with the blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

Abba! Father! whose Spirit dwells in us, receive our prayers for the needs of the church and the world and grant us to hear your word and dwell in you as children of God; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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### Notes

[1] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 487.

[2] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 102.

[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

[4] *Loc. cit.*

[5] Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981, p...302, quoting P. Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon saint Matthieu*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1963, p. 192.

[6] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0102.txt>

[7] [http://www.worship.ca/text/inter\\_a3.txt](http://www.worship.ca/text/inter_a3.txt)

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