

Proper 11



Pentecost 9

July 21, 2002

Prayer of the Day

O Lord, pour out upon us the spirit to think and do what is right, that we, who cannot even exist without you, may have the strength to live according to your will; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isaiah 44:6-8

{6} Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. {7} Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be. {8} Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one.

6. the Lord, the King of Israel...his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: LORD and King of Israel are in apposition. Redeemer and Lord of hosts are in apposition. "His" refers to Israel.

I am the first and I am the last: This expression is used first in Isaiah 51:4; also 48:12. It is also used in Revelation 1:8, 17; 22:13. This is a "merism" a figure of speech in which a pair of related objects is named, which comprises a totality including everything between the pair. The next phrase, *besides me there is no god*, is in parallel and defines the meaning of the merism. This is an explicit statement of monotheism as distinct from monolatry, the worship of one god. See verse 8. Other merisms include "the heavens and the earth," "morning and evening," and the extended merism in Ecclesiastes 3.

7-8: Yahweh challenges those who would dispute his uniqueness to prove that they are also gods. Yahweh alone knows and has told Israel what is yet to be.

7. who is like me: Questions about Yahweh's incomparability are found in: Exodus 15:11; Psalm 89:6; Deuteronomy 3:24; 4:3f, 7, 39; Isaiah 40:18, 25; 46:5. Similar assertions are found in: 2 Samuel 7:22; 1 Kings 8:23; Deuteronomy 10:17. Isaiah is not satisfied that Yahweh is simply incomparable; Yahweh alone is God. Isaiah 43:10-13.

8. any god besides me: In Exodus 20:3 and Deuteronomy 5:7 the commandment reads "no god before me ('*el-panai*, "before me")" which recognizes the possibility that another god could be given preference. Here, in Isaiah, a different preposition (*mibal'adhai*, "besides") is used which means "on an equal footing with."

there is no rock; I know not one: For the use of "rock" as a metaphor for "God" see Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 18, 30-31; 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2, 31, 46; Isaiah 17:10; Habakkuk 1:12.

Or

Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16-19

{12} Neither is there any god besides you, whose care is for all people, to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly.... {16} For your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all. {17} For you show your strength when people doubt the completeness of your power, and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it. {18} Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose. {19} Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.

12. *Neither is there any god besides you:* God has no peer to whom he is answerable for his judgments.

whose care is for all people: A note of universalism.

16. *the source of righteousness:* This is an important idea. What God does in his sovereignty is not subject to evaluation by some other standard, or subject to review by some other authority.

your sovereignty...causes you to spare all: God's power is not expressed in tyranny and oppression, but rather in patience and mercy.

17-18. *you rebuke any insolence...with mildness:* God rebukes those who are disrespectful, but he judges "with mildness" and forbearance.

19. *Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind:* "If God...knew that the seed of the Canaanites was evil...and that the Egyptians would stubbornly resist a change of heart (cf. 19:1-4), why did he go through the empty charade of giving them space for repentance? The answer is that God wished to provide a model lesson for his beloved people in order to teach them that they should practice humanity in their relations with others, and that repentance is always available to the sinner." [1]

Psalm 86:11-17

{11} Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. {12} I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. {13} For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. {14} O God, the insolent rise up against me; a band of ruffians seeks my life, and they do not set you before them. {15} But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. {16} Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant; save the child of your serving girl. {17} Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

12-13: The singer vows to sing a thanksgiving to Yahweh for his steadfast love and favor.

13. *you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol:* The "servant" (verses 2, 4) is in "the depths of Sheol," "the lowest underworld' in the domain of God-forsakenness and of death." [2] Yahweh has intervened and rescued him from his enemies.

14: The singer's enemies are characterized as insolent ruffians who do not honor Yahweh.

15. *merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness:* This is an ancient characterization of Yahweh found in Exodus 33:19; 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalms 103:8; 145:8 (the Psalm last week). There is a partial reference in Psalm 86:5.

16. *the child of your serving girl:* This may indicate the child of a woman who serves in the Temple. The singer may be one who is familiar with the Temple and its activities, and who considers him/herself to be known favorably by Yahweh.

Romans 8:12-25

{12} So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- {13} for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. {14} For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. {15} For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" {16} it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, {17} and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. {18} I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. {19} For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; {20} for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope {21} that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. {22} We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; {23} and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. {24} For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? {25} But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

12-14: Life lived according to the flesh and according to the Spirit are contrasted.

14. *children of God*: Literally, "sons of God." Also verses 16, 17 (*tekna*, specifically "children"), 21. "The mortification of the deeds of the body mentioned in 8:13 does not really constitute Christian life, necessary though it may be for the living of it. The Spirit instead animates and activates Christians, making them children of God." [3]

15. *spirit of adoption*: Through adoption by God we are included in his "honor." We are his and share in all his qualities and qualifications.

Abba: A familiar term for father in Aramaic; perhaps something like "poppa."

17. *heirs*: As God's adopted children we share in the estate. "The Christian as such an adopted son, is not only admitted into God's family, but by reason of the same gratuitous adoption receives the right to become master of his Father's estate. Despite having no natural right to it, he acquires title by adoption through the Spirit." [4] However, we have no rights of our own; if we abuse his honor we will be cut off.

suffer with him...glorified with him: What we suffer as Christians is not our suffering, but rather our participation in Christ's sufferings. And our participation in those sufferings is as certain as our sharing his glorification, and our being admitted into the Father's family as heirs.

23. *first fruits of the Spirit*: The first fruits of a harvest are dedicated to God (Leviticus 23:15-21), and bestow holiness on the whole crop.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

{24} He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; {25} but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. {26} So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. {27} And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' {28} He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' {29} But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. {30} Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'.... 36} Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." {37} He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; {38} the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, {39} and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. {40} Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. {41} The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, {42} and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. {43} Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

See the study for Proper 10 for comments on Matthew 13.

24: This parable is a commentary on the story of the fall in Genesis. God has created everything and it was good; the serpent tested the woman and the man and found them wanting. Now good and evil are intertwined in human community, and individuals. God urges patience so that in destroying evil we do not destroy the good as well.

25. *weeds*: The weed is darnel, a weed which looks like wheat. They are difficult to distinguish during the growing season.

29-30. *Let both of them grow together until the harvest*: The farmer will not risk destroying the good crop for the sake of destroying the weeds. At the proper time they will be separated and dealt with properly. Matthew's picture of the judgment is presented in Matthew 25:31-46.

According to Leviticus 19:19, sowing a field with two kinds of seed makes the whole field unclean. Pulling the weeds, which were deliberately sown, not just weeds growing at random, would not restore the holiness of the field.

[31-35: These verses contain the parables of the Mustard Seed (31-32) and the Leaven (33) which are part of the Gospel next Sunday, and the explanation of the use of parables (34-35). Jesus says he is talking about mysterious, hidden matters that cannot be spoken of apart from parables. If a

parable is the only way to tell the truth of the kingdom, then no explanation, not even Jesus' explanation can clarify what the parable says. By omitting this discussion the pericope leaves us with the impression that the explanation in verses 36-43 is an adequate representation of what Jesus intended. "The meaning and content of Jesus' parables are the parables themselves, and no prose commentary can ever replace them" [5] The parable cannot be "explained" or "interpreted" if that means translating into literal phrases meanings that can only be conveyed by non-literal images. [6]

36-39: he...went into the house: Three possibilities: Jesus' house (cf. Mark 2:15; also Matthew 9:10, which is probably Jesus' house.); Matthew's house (cf. Luke 5:29); or Peter's house (the last house identified before this passage in 8:14).

Explain to us the parable: The explanation of parable is a full-blown allegorical interpretation. The active participants in the allegory are the Son of Man, the devil and the angels. The children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one, identified with the good seed and the weeds, are passive elements in the judgment. "...that the two pericopes do not...stand in juxtaposition to each other can only be due to deliberate planning on the part of Matthew.... he conceived of each of these pericopes as independent in its own right, with the result that he assigned each one to that place where it would best serve its intended function. This means that the interpreter should not, as almost invariably happens, treat the parable of the Tares and its ostensible interpretation as two halves of the same whole. The 'Interpretation' of the Parable of the Tares is only apparently, not really an explanation of the parable of the Tares." [7] The parable is told to the crowd, at the lake, and its point is the master's desire to allow the crop as a whole to grow together until the harvest, while the explanation is told to the disciples, in the house, and is not concerned with the growth but with punishment.

41-42: his angels...will collect...all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire: "In the classical iconography of the Last Judgment, it is the demons who toss the souls of the damned into hell; in Matthew's interpretation, the 'angels' act strangely like demons." [8]

out of his kingdom: "The interpretation appears to make a distinction between a 'kingdom of the Son of man' ('his kingdom'—v. 41), from which the angels will expel everything evil; and 'the kingdom of the Father' ('their Father'—v. 43), which must mean the creation now fully redeemed...." [9]

The representation of the last judgment is one in which the righteous and evildoers are figures in a tableau. This is different from the description of the judgment in Matthew 25:31-40 where the separation of the sheep and the goats is made on the basis of how they treated the needy.

Reflection

Both first lessons understand the God of Israel as the only source of true power and sovereignty. All others are no gods and have no power to act independently. God is answerable to no other authority, but deals gently with people in order to set an example for his people. For the psalmist Yahweh alone is able to help. "In great distress, persecuted by enemies (v. 4), the petitioner and singer waits in the sanctuary for the word that guarantees Yahweh's answer and help; perhaps also the word of god's verdict that turns his indictment into an acquittal." [10] The second lesson contrasts the life lived in the spirit with that lived in the flesh. While life seems hard now, those who live in the spirit live in hope and will experience the glory of God.

The concept of the first fruits in the second lesson may be used to interpret the Gospel in such a way that the holiness of the righteous may include others within itself, so that they, too, become righteous. This is explicitly declared by Paul for the special case of an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:14). Paul also asserts his desire to be cut off so that his people might be saved (Romans 9:3; see Exodus 32:32).

The parable of the wheat and weeds describes the human experience of reality as a mixture of good and evil people. The task is not for the good to try to destroy the evil, but to wait patiently for God to do it. Sometimes God's justice seems to take a long time, because God is patient and

kind. We should learn from God to treat those who differ from us with gentleness and patience. One aspect that is overlooked is that what happens to the field, and in the world, also happens within each of us. "We can also grow impatient with God when our prayers to uproot some personal weed seem to go unanswered.... God will not uproot the wheat of your survival to get at the weed of your fury." [11]

Hymns [12]

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

499 E--Come, Thou Fount
407 D--Come, You Thankful
186 I--How Blessed Is
699v I--Blessed Assurance
311 P--Wondrous Are Your

770v P--I Was There
493 II--Hope of the
688v II--O Holy Spirit
236 G--When Seed Falls
227, 261, 796s, 383

Prayers of the People [13]

A: In seeking to gather weeds, O Christ, we unwittingly uproot the good wheat that has been planted by you. For humility and patience in our journeys of faith we pray, saying, "For the sake of Christ," and respond, "Amen."

A: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Life-giver of all that is, for in your mercy you have given your disciples abundant grace. As we have richly received, help us to richly give so that all people might know of your abundance. For the sake of Christ. C: Amen.

A: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Maker of all things, for in your goodness you bring forth the fruit of the earth. Give your blessings to those who sow, plant, harvest and share with others the abundance that they themselves have received from you. For the sake of Christ. C: Amen.

A: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Healer of the world's sorrow, for in your great compassion you have called all people to you. Give us eyes to see Christ in the black, brown, red, yellow and white faces of our neighbours, and give us hearts to celebrate each other's goodness. For the sake of Christ. C: Amen.

A: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, Light to the nations, for in your goodness you bring sight to eyes that are blind. Fill all catechumens with your Holy Spirit that they might encourage those of us who grow weary of keeping the faith. For the sake of Christ. C: Amen.

A: Blessed are you, O Lord our God, for you walk with the hungry, the poor and the confused. Walk also with us, we pray, that we might die to our own needs and so give life to others. For the sake of Christ. C: Amen.

P: You are with us in the sowing and the harvesting, Gracious God; be with us also, we pray, in the breaking of the bread.

Or [14]

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God who judges us with mildness and governs us with great forbearance.

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 those who sow and those who reap the harvest, for those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For all those in danger and need: 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

God and Father of all things, hear the prayers we offer today and set free your creation from its bondage to decay; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Notes

[1] David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979, p. 243.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 183

[3] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York: Doubleday, 1993, p. 499.

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 502.

[5] Dominic Crossan, "Parables as Religious and Poetic Experience," *Journal of Religion* 53()353.

[6] Robert Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God*, New York, 1966, p. 196.

[7] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction Criticism*. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1969, p. 66.

[8] Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981, p. 313.

[9] *Loc. cit.*

[10] Kraus, *Ibid.*, p.181.

[11] Garret Keizer, "God so loves the wheat," *Christian Century*, June 30-July 7, 1999, p. 675.

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

[13] http://www.worship.ca/text/inter_a3.txt

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