

Proper 11



July 20, 2003

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.

Jeremiah 23:1-6

{1} Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. {2} Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. {3} Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. {4} I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD. {5} The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. {6} In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

1. *the shepherds*: "Judah's rulers—but perhaps here (plural) including both the king (Zedekiah?) and the nobles who dominated him." [1]

2. *you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you*: "A play on the verb *pqd* which on its first occurrence has the force of 'look after, care for,' and on the second that of 'call to account, punish.'" [2]

4. *nor shall any be missing*: "The play on *pqd* continues. The sheep are "looked after,' therefore 'mustered,' 'counted,' therefore not 'missing.'" [3]

5. *David*: the Davidic dynasty.

a righteous branch: Not a false pretender to the throne.

6. "*The Lord is our righteousness*": The Hebrew for this phrase is similar to the name "Zedekiah." Some believed that Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, would save Judah from the Babylonians. But Zedekiah had little authority and less power though he reigned from 597 to 587 bc. The reference in this passage, written after the deportation, is ironic. Yahweh's judgment on Zedekiah, pronounced by Jeremiah, is recorded in Jeremiah 21.

"The prophecy has to do with the ideal king (Messiah) of the Davidic line under whose just and victorious rule all the dynastic hopes would be realized.... The term 'Shoot' (*semah*), in most EVV 'Branch,' later became a technical term for this expected king (Zech. Iii 8; vi 12).... The similarity of the future Davidide's name to that of Zedekiah...is scarcely coincidental." [4]

Psalms 23

{1} The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. {2} He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; {3} he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. {4} Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. {5} You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. {6} Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

1. *The LORD is my shepherd*: The image of Yahweh as the shepherd of Israel is common in the Old Testament beginning with Genesis 49:24. (See also Psalm 79:13; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ezekiel 34:15ff. In the ancient Near East a king is characterized as a shepherd. The imagery of shepherd and sheep dominates the song: green pastures, still waters, rod and staff, but other images are also used: he restores my soul, you prepare a table, my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows, goodness and mercy shall follow me.

The Psalm reflects Yahweh's promise in the first lesson to "gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands...and ...bring them back to their fold [where]...they shall be fruitful and multiply."

Ephesians 2:11-22

{11} So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"--a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands-- {12} remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. {13} But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. {14} For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. {15} He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, {16} and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. {17} So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; {18} for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. {19} So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, {20} built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. {21} In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; {22} in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

11-13. *"the uncircumcision"*: Gentiles, non-Israelites to whom the covenant of circumcision had been given, were aliens and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, without God. Now they have been brought near to God by the blood of Christ.

14-16: Christ has made both "the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision" into one new humanity, and has destroyed the barriers that have separated us and made peace through the cross.

18. *both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father*: By the gift of the Spirit both Jews and Gentiles have been restored to God.

21-22. *the whole structure is joined together...into a holy temple*: Both are members of the household of God which is built into a holy temple upon the cornerstone of Christ and the foundation of the teaching of the apostles and prophets. This temple is greater than the temples of the gods of the Gentiles, and even greater than the Temple in Jerusalem, truly "a dwelling place for God."

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

{30} The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had and taught. {31} He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. {32} And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. {33} Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. {34} As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.... {53} When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. {54} When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, {55} and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. {56} And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

30. *The apostles*: See Mark 3:14 where Mark identifies the *apostles* as *the twelve*. Originally, these two designations probably referred to two different or overlapping groups. *told him all that they had done and taught*: The apostles tell Jesus what they had done and taught on the mission Jesus had sent them on in verses 7-13 (part of the Gospel for Proper 9). During the interval between the beginning of the mission of the twelve and this verse Mark has told us about the death of John the Baptist (the Gospel for last week, Proper 10).

31-32. *a deserted place all by yourselves.... a deserted place by themselves*: "The position of the wilderness-place is identified by most commentators with the north-east side of the lake." [5] According to verse 53 the place is on the other side of the Sea from Gennesaret, which is on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. The wilderness ("a deserted place") has an ambiguous place in Israelite thinking. It stands in contrast to the order of creation. It is the place of testing for Israel at the time of the Exodus. Yet it was in the wilderness that Yahweh guided and cared for his people. Yahweh had threatened the disobedient people with the wilderness. Yet the restoration from exile was couched in terms of making the wilderness bloom (Isaiah 35:1ff). Here it is the positive aspects of the wilderness that are in view.

31, 33-34. *many were coming and going.... Now many saw them going.... he saw a great crowd*: In verse 44 the number of men is determined to be 5,000. It is implied that 200 denarii worth of bread would feed the crowd. "Two denarii would provide twenty-four days of bread ration for a poor itinerant." [6] Two hundred denarii worth of bread then would translate into one meal's bread ration for 7,200 poor itinerants. Matthew says women and children were also in the crowd (Matthew 14:21).

35ff.: The reading omits verses 35-44, the story of the feeding of the 5000; verses 45-46, the departure of the disciples while Jesus dismissed the crowd and went off to pray; and verses 47-52, the disciples in the boat and Jesus "walking on the sea."

54-56: Again the crowds flock to Jesus, now bringing the sick to him for healing.

56. *touch even the fringe of his cloak*: Matthew said that the woman with a hemorrhage touched "the fringe of his garment" (Matthew 9:20). Fringes or tassels are required for the outer garments of Israelites according to Numbers 15:38f, Deuteronomy 22:12.

all who touched it were healed: Healing was "focused on restoring a person to a valued state of being rather than an ability to function." [7] Jesus "is a spirit-filled prophet who vanquishes unclean spirits and a variety of illnesses and restores people to their proper place in the community." [8]

A major concern with this reading is the omission of verses 35-52. With the feeding and walking on water stories gone the focus is on Jesus' compassion on people who are vulnerable and disconnected from the security of their communities. Jesus entrusts the people to the care of God as Yahweh, who guided and cared for Israel in the Exodus and in the return from exile.

Reflection

Those whom Yahweh has made shepherds of his people, who have not cared for them, will be punished and Yahweh will appoint new shepherds. God's people will be saved and live in safety. This is the promise Yahweh made to his chosen people. Zedekiah was believed by many to be the promised king, but the promise was not fulfilled in him. The Psalmist knows that Yahweh will guide and protect him/her, and fears nothing. (S)he will dwell in the house of Yahweh forever.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus provided for the humble and outcast Israelites the blessing of Yahweh's compassion. The second lesson tells us that Gentiles, who were aliens and strangers without hope, have been made a part of the household of God. We accept this as appropriate and our due, but in the first century among Jews it was a revolutionary idea.

Perhaps we should remember that it took the blood of Christ to bring us, who were far off,

near to God. Perhaps we should not be quick to deny to others, whom we see as undeserving, the same reconciliation and peace we have enjoyed. For Christ has "abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances," and made us citizens with the saints, not because of our righteousness but because of Christ's blood.

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

255 --E--Lord, Receive this

819s --E/II--Christ is Made (747v)

313 --D--A Multitude Comes

359 --II--In Christ There Is

365 --II--Built on a

750v --II--Oh, Praise the

805s --G--There's a Wideness

754v --G--Let Us Talents (770s)

206, 367, 369, 822s

Prayers of the People [10]

We come to you O God, as people who are no longer strangers. We have been joined to Christ in a death like his so that we can live in his newness of life. Give us ears that hear you speak, lives that are dedicated to your service, and a rich sense of awe at what you have done and what you do, even in our daily lives. God of Jew and Gentile hear our prayer.

Give us, by your Holy Spirit, a vision of the need we can address. Give us not only an awareness of our purpose and mission but give us also the grace to do what purpose and mission suggest. Bless all who gather this next weekend in the Global Mission Event. Bless them in their understanding, celebration of and will to be in mission. God of Jew and Gentile hear our prayer.

Or [11]

Presider or deacon

Reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus, let us offer prayers for the peace of the world.

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 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, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God our shepherd, hear the prayers we offer today and touch all peoples with your healing; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

- [1] John Bright, *Jeremiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., p. 143.
- [2] *Loc. cit.*
- [3] *Loc. cit.*
- [4] *Loc. cit.*
- [5] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1955, p. 3.19.
- [6] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 291.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- [8] *Ibid. p. 211.*
- [9] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclb9900.txt>
- [10] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt
- [11] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>