

Proper 13

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Pentecost 11
August 4, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Gracious Father, your blessed Son came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world. Give us this bread, that he may live in us and we in him, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isaiah 55:1-5

{1} Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. {2} Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. {3} Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. {4} See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. {5} See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

1-5: Yahweh is the speaker in these verses. He offers food and drink to the exiles as the exiles were provided with water (Exodus 17:1-7) and manna (Exodus 16:15). Food and drink are also offered by Wisdom (Proverbs 9:1-6). And in the Gospel Jesus fulfills Yahweh's offer of food.

3. listen that you may live: One lives from the wisdom one receives from God.

everlasting covenant...my steadfast, sure love for David: "Only in vs. 3 is Israel associated with David in Second Isaiah; and the allusion to David here contains no suggestion that Second Isaiah sees a restored monarchy in restored Israel.... The eternity of David's covenant is transferred to the covenant with Israel restored." [1]

5. you shall call nations: Restored Israel has a missionary task among the nations that do not know Yahweh, and who do not "know," that is, recognize Israel.

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21

{8} The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. {9} The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.... {14} The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. {15} The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. {16} You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. {17} The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. {18} The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. {19} He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. {20} The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. {21} My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

The Psalm is an alphabetic song of praise. Psalm 145:8-14 is also the Psalm for Proper 9A. See the study for Proper 9 this year for comments.

Romans 9:1-5

{1} I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit-- {2} I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. {3} For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. {4} They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; {5} to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all,

God blessed forever. Amen.

1. *I am speaking the truth in Christ....*: Paul includes his words within an oath which attests to the truth and sincerity of what he says.

2. *I have great sorrow....*: Paul's ethnic community has not accepted the Gospel and Paul is profoundly saddened.

3. *I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ*: "The vb. *euchesthai* means basically "pray," but the sense of it as "wish" is attested from the fifth century b.c. on. But it might mean, "I myself would pray," [2] if Paul is indeed alluding to Moses' prayer in Exod 32:32." But Paul knows that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39).

my own people: He is speaking as a Jew his ethnic kin, the Jewish people.

my kindred according to the flesh: He may imply that he also has kindred of another sort, according to the Spirit, or something like that. The early church understood itself as a kinship in which people were brothers and sisters.

4-5. *to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs*: The seven prerogatives are all historical, not ideal, or eschatological prerogatives. *Adoption*: Exodus 4:22, "Israel is my firstborn son." *Glory*: "The second prerogative is the resplendent manifestation of Yahweh's presence to Israel at the exodus and the crossing of the Reed Sea (Exod 15:6, 11), in the desert (Exod 16:10; 40:34), and in the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kgs 8:11). [3] *Covenants*: The covenants with Abraham (Genesis 15:18; 17:2), at Sinai (Exodus 24:7-8), and with David (2 Samuel 23:5). *Law*: "Paul regarded it as 'the oracles of God' (3:2), by which Israel was enabled to 'know his will' (2:18), for *torah* literally means 'instruction.' Israel had as its instructor God himself, and because of that *torah* Israel possessed an unparalleled wisdom, and educative force and guide for its life." [4] *Worship*: A part of the *torah* described the non-idolatrous worship Yahweh designed for himself. *Promises*: Those made to Abraham (Genesis 12:2; 13:14-17; 15:4; 17:4-8, 16, 19; 21:12; 22:16-18) Isaac (Genesis 26:3-5), Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14), Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18-19) and David (2 Samuel 7:11-16). [5] *Patriarchs*: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

5. *from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah*: The messiah is implicit in the covenant with David. Here the messiah is not the anointed heir to the throne, but "God's anointed agent of salvation." [6]

Matthew 14:13-21

{13} Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. {14} When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. {15} When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." {16} Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." {17} They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." {18} And he said, "Bring them here to me." {19} Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. {20} And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. {21} And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

13: *when Jesus heard this*: In Matthew 12:15 f. Jesus "withdrew from there" when he became aware of the Pharisees' plans to destroy him. "Jesus sees through the plans of the Pharisees. He is not a plaything for their conspiracies. That he retreats is neither flight nor a sign of fear.... many people follow him but not the Pharisees." [7] What Jesus heard this time was the report of the death of John the Baptist, from his disciples. Again Jesus withdrew and the people followed him.

13-14: A crowd gathered, Jesus cured their sick. The scene is set for the miracle story.

15-17: The disciples asked Jesus to send the crowd away, but Jesus told the disciples to give them

something to eat. The disciples had only five loaves and two fish.

19-21: Jesus blessed the loaves and fish. He gave them to the disciples. The disciples distribute them to the people. All ate and were filled, twelve baskets of scraps were picked up; five thousand men besides women and children were fed.

Reflection

In the first lesson grace is illustrated by an invitation; food and drink without price. Yahweh gives a party and makes an everlasting covenant with his people. They will call the nations and they will come to the Holy One of Israel.

Yahweh's gracious invitation in the first lesson is echoed by the Psalmist. Yahweh is "good to all," "his compassion is over all that he has made," and specific details are added: the fallen and bowed down are rescued, all creatures are fed, and all who call on him and cry to him are heard. In response the Psalmist declares his intent and the response of all creatures to praise and bless Yahweh.

In the early years of the church Gentiles sought to enter the kingdom of God by converting to Israel, and accepting the yoke of the law, or by responding in faith to Jesus as the Son of God. Paul proclaimed the latter, while other Christian Jews and some Christian Gentiles urged the former.

For Christian Jews there were also two ways. Some Israelites believed that Jesus was the Messiah and, renouncing the cult and sonship of Israel, accepted the new universal way into God's kingdom. Paul agonized over those Israelites who did not take that way, but recognized that the old way of Israel was not withdrawn. Israel was and remains chosen by God. To her, and to her alone, belong the covenants, the law, the promises God gave her. From Israel came the Messiah who did not replace Israel with Christian believers, but who reached beyond Israel to those who believe in him without becoming Jews.

In its (earthly) wisdom the (Gentile) Church has operated on the assumption that there is only one way into the kingdom, that is, the way of Gentile believers. Gentile believers have sought to convert or "complete" Jews by convincing them of the rightness of the Gentile position, or failing that, forcing them to convert, or, believing that they are not worthy to convert, have sought to destroy them. Perhaps it is time that we recognized that there are two ways (and perhaps more), equally valid, to enter the kingdom of the Biblical God.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle story found in all four of the Gospels. The fantastic number, "five thousand men, besides women and children," should not be a problem for people who can believe in witches and monsters, crop circles and ancient astronauts. In any case, the story should be treated as a witness to the power of God, not as an occasion for an argument about the nature and validity of revelation. That is not the point of the pericope in the Gospel, nor in the lectionary.

The story is an implicit declaration of Jesus' deity. As God supplies the needs of all living things, so Jesus also heals the sick and feeds the hungry. It also indicates God's power in Christ to empower the disciples, and the church to continue Jesus' works of compassion. As with several of the stories in Matthew's Gospel, this story finds its programmatic description in Matthew 25:31-46.

"Perhaps we have been too preoccupied with determining the exact nature of the miracle to grasp the revolutionary nature of the sign.... The feeding of the 5,000 implies a program that is out of this world in everything but its application, a program that refuses to rationalize complicity with evil in the name of evil's "complexity." In response to the 'practical' question 'What good would that do?'—one cup of cold water, one widow's mite, five loaves of bread—the answer Jesus gives is always the same. 'Let's see.'" [8]

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

517 E--Praise to the
360 E--O Christ, the
493 D--Hope of the
786s I--Come Now, O

235 G--Break Now the
409 G--Praise and Thanksgiving
754 G--Let Us Talents
352, 423, 775s, 211

Prayers of the People [10]

P or A: Christ sees to the needs of the crowds. Let us bring our needs and those of all people before God saying, "Show us your marvelous loving-kindness," and responding, "Hear our prayer."

A: You choose leaders to provide for your people, yet at times they come to you downhearted and empty-handed. Let us bring forward whatever talent and treasure we have, ask the blessing of Christ and see how graciously you provide in every need. Show us your marvelous loving-kindness. Hear us, we pray.

A: You call forth leaders for the nations. May we be governed in peace and with justice. Defeat plans for war and intimidation. How long will the poverty-stricken and the brutalized wait for your jubilee of freedom? Show us your marvelous loving-kindness. Hear us, we pray.

A: We struggle with our destiny as your daughters and sons. We ache for a way to make a difference in the world and honor your name and creative purpose. We need courage to stand firm and not give up until we have received your blessing. Bless the Lutheran Student Movement Canada now at their conference in Saskatoon Show us your marvelous loving-kindness. Hear us, we pray.

A: We know of the compassion of Jesus for the sick among the crowds he encountered. We ask for that compassion and healing in our lives and for all who suffer from addiction, depression or illness. We remember those who have asked for our prayers: _____. Show us your marvelous loving-kindness. Hear us, we pray.

P: Guide us in the truth of Christ. Confirm us in your Holy Spirit. Use us to provide for the needs of all, so that baskets of pieces that are left over, may be gathered and saved so that nothing may be lost. Amen.

Or [11]

Presider or deacon

The love of God endures all we suffer.

Let us offer prayers for peace among those God loves.

Deacon or other leader

For N our bishop and N our presbyter, for this holy gathering, and for all who share the bread of life.

For the leaders of the nations, and for mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

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

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

For the dying and the dead.

For ourselves, our families and 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 who breaks bread among us, hear our prayers for all in need and fill your hungry people with manna from heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Notes

[1] John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968, pp. 243-244.

[2] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1993, p. 544.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 546.

[4] *Loc. cit.*

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 547.

[6] *Loc. cit.*

[7] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 200. p. 190.

[8] Garret Keizer, "The other temptations," *Christian Century*, July 14-21, 1999, p. 707.

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

[10] http://www.worship.ca/text/int_a2.txt

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