

Proper 23

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Pentecost 21 October 13, 2002

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, source of every blessing, your generous goodness comes to us anew every day. By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness, give thanks for your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The original of the prayer "appears in the *Church Book [for the Use of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations]*. Philadelphia: Lutheran Book Store] (1878, not in 1868) and, in German, in Loehe's *Agende* (1884). A much fuller version of the prayer was appointed for A Day of General or Special Thanksgiving in both *The Lutheran Hymnary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913, p. 82, and the *Service Book and Hymnal*, Minneapolis:Augsburg Publishing House, 1958, p. 115.

Isaiah 25:1-9

{1} O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. {2} For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. {3} Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. {4} For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, {5} the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled. {6} On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. {7} And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. {8} Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. {9} It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

"...the diverse literary forms have been carefully shaped into a coherent composition that, following the lead of chapter 24, offers a paradigmatic presentation of Israel's proper response to the announcement of both catastrophic world judgment and God's ultimate plan for the redemption of Israel and the nations."

1-5: Verses 1-5 are a psalm of thanksgiving in the first person singular, where the singular individual is a representative of the community. The enemy is likened to a winter rainstorm and heat in a time of drought. The singer praises Yahweh for his protection of his people, bringing shade and shelter.

2. the city: The attempt to identify the unnamed city has been unsuccessful. It is the capital of an enemy state.

6-8: These verses pick up the them of 24:23. Having punished earthly kings and heavenly powers, Yahweh now inaugurates a festival on Mt. Zion to celebrate his kingship.

for all peoples: "most significant, it is explicitly stated that the new order of divine rule includes 'all peoples.' This emphasis is infrequent in chapters 24-27, but the theme grows in strength throughout both Second and Third Isaiah (56:6ff.; 60:1.; 66:18f.)."

a feast: "The motif of the eschatological banquet, which makes its first appearance here, came into its own in the later Second Temple period."

rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear: "...a menu calculated to alarm the health-conscious today but standard fare for the well-heeled in antiquity."

7. the shroud...the sheet...death: A three-fold parallelism.

he will swallow up death forever: "the wording seems to have been chosen to recall the old Canaanite myth of Mot (the Canaanite deity whose name means death) who swallows Baal at the beginning of the arid season and who is himself in due course overcome. The mythological undertow pulls the meaning of the phrase in the direction of death as something more than a punctual event, as a force of disorder, negativity, and aridity, morally and physically, in connection with which the actual dying of the individual is episodic and incidental."

8. *from all faces...of his people*: All peoples will be relieved of the suffering inflicted by war, and the disgrace of the subjection of the covenant people will be removed.

9: "The next verses set up a contrast between Israel's confession and Moab's exclusion. At first it might seem logical to interpret the prayer as one made by 'all peoples' as in v. 6, but this reading is unlikely. Indeed, God includes the peoples in his invitation, but the voice that responds to God's salvation uses explicitly the idiom of faithful Israel.... The joy expressed in 25:9 is that the period of waiting is finally over as God's salvation is experienced. The divine blessing on those who have waited has been indeed realized."

Psalm 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.

Traditionally Psalm 23 is attributed to David. The psalm itself indicates that the singer has been anointed with oil and dwells in the Temple, "the house of the Lord." The trust expressed by the psalmist would be appropriate for one who has been anointed as King of Israel, and with the spirit of the Lord.

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; 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.

2-3: The very careful poetic structure of the Psalm is based on parallelism between the lines of the poem and the relationship of metaphor to declaration. The meaning of the parallels is made explicit in the last line.

He makes me lie down in green pastures

He leads me beside still waters

He restores my soul

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake

4-5. *I fear no evil; for you are with me*

your rod and your staff—they comfort me

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies

you anoint my head with oil

my cup overflows.

4. *the darkest valley*: In the Gospel, Jesus says he is the light of the world. As that light he enlightens even the darkest valleys.

5. *you anoint my head with oil*: See the notes on 1 Samuel 16. The singer is an anointed person; the king?

6. *I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long*: The Temple in Jerusalem was the royal sanctuary, it was the King's Temple. The people had access to it only by permission.

"The background of the psalm of trust represents a definite danger. The petitioner has enemies, his life is threatened and persecuted. But in the Temple, in the community of Yahweh, [*tov vehesed*] ["goodness and mercy"] has met the one persecuted. Now he knows that he is sheltered in the protective power of the [*shem*] [name].... the petitioner knows that his life is always sheltered and surrounded by well-being.

Philippians 4:1-9

{1} Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. {2} I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. {3} Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. {4} Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. {5} Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. {6} Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. {7} And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. {8} Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. {9} Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

2. *Euodia...Syntyche*: We know nothing about these two women beyond what we are told here. They have been instrumental in the propagation of the Gospel, but are now at odds with each other. Paul calls on them to be reconciled, and then addresses an unnamed "loyal companion" to help them.

be of the same mind in the Lord: Being of the same mind is a theme of this letter. See Philippians 2:2 and 3:15. The "same mind" the community is to share is the same as the one that was in Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

3. *Clement* is mentioned as a co-worker with Paul only here.

book of life: As early as Exodus 32:32 there is reference to a book kept by God in which are written the names of those people who are in God's good graces, or a record of the acts by which people are judged (Daniel 12:1). Jesus says we should rejoice "that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

4-6, 8: The proper way to live in Christ: rejoicing, not worrying, thinking about those things that are commendable and worthy of praise.

4. *rejoice*: Farewell: "the usual Greek salutation given either at meeting or at parting."

5. *The Lord is near*: A reflection of Paul's expectation of immanent return of Christ to establish his kingdom.

6. *Do not worry about anything*: The Christian community had ample reason to worry about the threat of persecution and other serious dangers, but Paul bids them not to be anxious because God is greater than any threat.

7. *the peace of God*: "Peace does not describe a rosy, turmoil-free, ideal state. It is not the absence of trouble or strife. Paul was not in such a state (1:20-26). But God's peace describes the power of God's presence in every moment, even and especially those fraught with pain and suffering. Peace is the presence of hope and comfort in knowing that the Lord is at hand in every time and place."

8. *Finally*: Paul offers a final exhortation calling on the Philippians to turn their thoughts to worthy things: things that are true, honorable, pure, pleasing, excellent and praiseworthy. This,

perhaps, in contrast to the thoughts generated by the conflict of Euodia and Syntyche.

Matthew 22:1-14

{1} Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: {2} "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. {3} He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. {4} Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' {5} But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, {6} while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. {7} The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. {8} Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. {9} Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' {10} Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. {11} "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, {12} and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. {13} Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' {14} For many are called, but few are chosen."

The parallel in Luke 14:15-24 (not used in the RCL) is set in the house of a ruler of the Pharisees (Luke 14:1-6), where it applied as a critique of "the righteous who need no repentance," and an affirmation of "the poor and maimed and blind and lame," in other words, those who are specifically excluded from the corporate worship of Israel. Matthew 22:11-13 are a supplement unique to Matthew

2. *The kingdom of heaven may be compared to:* "...means "The way God's patronage relates to and affects his clients is like the following scenario:..." Matthew also uses this opening in 13:24 and 18:23.

a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son: Another meal that illustrates the nature of the kingdom of heaven is in Proverbs 9, where Wisdom prepares a meal, and invites the "simple" to partake.

3. *those who had been invited...would not come:* The reasons given for their unwillingness to attend are trivial. "The excuses, much beside the point, are an indirect but traditional way of signaling disapproval of the dinner arrangements on the part of the elite who have been invited."

5-6. "The excuses, much beside the point, are an indirect but traditional way of signaling disapproval of the dinner arrangements on the part of the elite who have been invited. The shameful treatment and murder of the king's servants are a direct insult to the king's honor. Royal satisfaction would demand something as described in v. 7."

7. *The king was enraged...:* This verse "...is surely a reference to the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans under Titus in ad 70. The Roman armies can be regarded as armies sent by God in the same sense that Isaiah looked upon the Assyrians as the instrument of God's anger against Israel (Isa. 10:5f)."

8-9: The slaves are sent out again to invite whomever they find to the wedding banquet. This second invitation (or third) is not a Matthean addition, as Beare, for example, suggests; it already appears in the Gospel of Thomas 64. "To get the irony of the scene, one needs to note that table fellowship across status lines was relatively rare in traditional societies. In the inclusive Christian communities it was an ideal that cause sharp friction in practice (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-34) on several accounts." In 8:11-12 Matthew describes the kingdom in terms of a meal in which people come from all points of the compass to eat together. "...overtones from these verses will be heard repeatedly throughout the entire gospel...."

10. both good and bad: "Matthew lays the groundwork for the story of the inspection to come (vv. 11ff.). Jesus came to call sinners; of course the gospel invitation went to band and good alike, and especially to the bad."

11-13: "...Matthew has himself devised this supplement as a warning to the members of the

church. They have heard the gospel invitation and have been admitted to the company of the redeemed. But if they have not amended their ways and their doings, they will still be rejected at the Last Judgement (*sic*). For it is certainly the separation of the good from the bad at the Last Judgement which Matthew has in mind, as, for instance, in the parable of the wheat and the tares (13:24-30, 36-43)."

14. many are called but few are chosen: This proverb (?) does not follow from the parable. The first guests have lost their place at the king's banquet, but of all those whom the king's servants brought in only one is excluded. The version in the Gospel of Thomas (64) has quite a different conclusion: "Businessmen and merchants will not enter the Place of My Father," with reference to those who were first invited. The story of the man with no wedding garment does not appear in Thomas.

Reflection

Food is used in three of the lessons as an image of God's favorable presence with his people. In Isaiah it is an image of eternal blessing. In the 23rd Psalm it is a repudiation of the singer's enemies, and in the Gospel it is offered to all and sundry when the banquet is rejected by the chosen guests. God loves his people and provides for their eternal salvation. If they will not accept his love and reject his gift, they will have no place with him. In the second lesson the Christians in Philippi are called on to think of noble and virtuous matters, and they are promised that "the God of peace will be with you."

Historically, the parable has been read as a repudiation of Israel and Judaism in favor of Gentiles and Christians. However, we must remember that Matthew is not writing his Gospel for the non-Christian community. He is writing for Christians, and here specifically for Christians who have become elitists and have rejected Jesus' invitation to all people to come into the kingdom.

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

171 E—Rejoice, the Lord

313 D—A Multitude Comes

299 II—Dear Christians, One

552 II—In Thee Is

769s G—My God, Your

429 G—Where Cross the

496, 291, 553, 31

Prayers of the People

P or A: Remembering one another with thanksgiving and the needs of all people let us pray saying, "Let us proclaim the greatness of our God," and responding, "God's name is great and awesome."

A: We are your holy people, O God, set apart for works of faith and labors of love. Open our eyes, hearts, and hands to the good work you have prepared for us to do. May the worship of all gathered here and the worship of our daily work be pleasing to you. Let us proclaim the greatness of our God. God's name is great and awesome.

A: We pray for good government for ourselves and for all nations that promotes security and peace. May all citizens be taxed fairly and may we see paying our taxes as part of our care and support for others. Let us proclaim the greatness of our God. God's name is great and awesome.

A: We pray for missionaries and Volunteers in Mission. They communicate the gospel in word and deed to those who have need of your care. May the steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ which empowered St. Paul also empower and encourage them. Let us proclaim the greatness of our God. God's name is great and awesome.

A: We trust you to be gracious and show mercy. We commend to your unfailing grace and mercy

those who are sick or in some special need: _____. You are our rock and our refuge. Let us proclaim the greatness of our God. God's name is great and awesome.

P: Make our faith a light for others, that we may honor you in every way, at all times. Hear the prayers we offer for the sake and in the name of Jesus, your Son, our brother. Amen.

Or

Presider or deacon

As we rejoice in the Lord always, let us make known our requests to God, the refuge of the poor and needy.

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 candidates for public office and for mercy, justice, and peace among all peoples.

For good weather, abundant fruits of the earth and peaceful times.

For our city and those who live in it and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

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

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

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

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 the king of heaven, who wipes away every tear, hear the prayers we offer this day and clothe us in robes of white for the wedding banquet of your Son, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Notes

[1] Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947, p. 575.

[2] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 183.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[4] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 2000, p. 358.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 359.

[6] *Loc. cit.*

[7] Childs, *ibid.*, p. 185.

[8] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 309.

[9] F.W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959, p. 145.

[10] Thomas S. Hanson, Shane M.J. Groth, Lori L.J. Rosenkvist, Tommi-Riva Numbala (editors), *Exploring the Yearly Lectionary: Studies in the Series C Bible Texts*. Augsburg Fortress, 1991, p. 13.

[11] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 134.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[13] *Loc. cit.*

[14] Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981, p. 435.

[15] Malina, *ibid.*, p. 135.

- [16] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-22: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, p. 11.
- [17] Beare, *ibid.*, p. 436.
- [18] *Loc. cit.*
- [19] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0102.txt>
- [20] http://www.worship.ca/text/int_a2.txt
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