

November 9, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Lord, when the day of wrath comes we have no hope except in your grace. Make us so to watch for the last days that the consummation of our hope may be the joy of the marriage feast of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Kings 17:8-16

{8} Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, {9} "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." {10} So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." {11} As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." {12} But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." {13} Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. {14} For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." {15} She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. {16} The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

9. *Zarephath*: About seven miles south of Sidon. It "belongs" to Sidon, that is, it was politically and economically tied to the larger town.

widow: A widow had no legal existence, so her position, like that of other "non-persons," orphans, aliens, and so on, was precarious. The situation of this widow and her son is desperate.

10-13. Elijah's request that she take care of his needs before preparing a last meal for herself and her son, calls on her to act against her natural maternal and survival instincts.

12. *As the Lord your God lives*: The oath formula, *chai Yhwh* ("Yahweh lives"), occurs 43 times in Hebrew text. The emphasis of the phrase is probably to characterize Yahweh as a God who is not idle but acts effectually. [1] "There is no trace in any of the passages of a contrast with a dying god of the Canaanite type." [2] The identification of Yahweh as "your God" is not an indication that the woman of Zarephath was not a worshipper of Yahweh. It could be translated either "Yahweh lives," or "Yahweh's life."

14: The association of Elijah's demand with the claim that her needs would be provided for calls on her to trust Yahweh's promise rather than the reality of her bit of flour and oil.

15-16: She did what Elijah asked, and Yahweh did what Elijah promised.

Psalm 146

{1} Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! {2} I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. {3} Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. {4} When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. {5} Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, {6} who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; {7} who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; {8} the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. {9} The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. {10} The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

The Psalm makes several associations with the first lesson. In verse 3 there is the admonition not to put ones trust in princes, but rather to rely on Yahweh for help. In verse 9 the three groups of "non-persons, the stranger, the orphan and the widow" connects with the widow and her orphan son in the lesson.

The Psalm is an individual song of praise with elements of the hymn and song of thanksgiving. It belongs to the Hallelujah Psalms (146-150, 113-118). "The praise of God fills the whole of life (v. 2). To praise God is even the very fulfillment of human existence. But only he can praise God who trusts in God, and that means that one who does not rely on human beings and on powers that are subject to sudden collapse and death." [3]

Hebrews 9:24-28

{24} For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. {25} Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; {26} for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. {27} And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, {28} so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

"In explaining how the heavenly cleansing [mentioned in verse 23] takes place, our author returns to the imagery of the Yom Kippur [Day of Atonement] ritual and makes an elaborate comparison between the image and the reality." [4]

Christ enters heaven, rather than the earthly copy, the temple, to appear before God on our behalf (verse 24). His offering was a once-for-all sacrifice of himself rather than a repeated sacrifice of the blood of animals (verses 24-26). Like mortals, who only die once, so Christ is only offered once. He will appear a second time, not to be judged, but to be the judge, to save, not to condemn (verses 27-28).

Mark 12:38-44

{38} As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, {39} and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! {40} They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." {41} He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. {42} A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. {43} Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. {44} For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

38-39: Jesus' warning continues his instruction against seeking recognition and power. See, for example, 9:33-37; 10:35-45. Here, however, the general instruction is specifically directed against scribes whom Jesus has challenged in the previous verses. "Scribes served many functions, including copying sacred texts, drawing up legal documents, serving as accountants, administrators, and even legal advisors. Most ancient scribes were not well educated by modern standards, though a few could master the intricate detail of Israelite Law or compose complex works such as those found in the Judean Pseudepigrapha. These latter were among the elite scribal sector, while village non-elite scribes played only very simple roles, like drawing up debt contracts or marriage contracts by rote." [5]
40. *They devour widows' houses*: The law at Sinai forbid abusing widows and orphans (Exodus 22:22), while Isaiah 1:17 urges the active defense of the widow's rights. See Matthew 23:1-7 for a fuller description of the short-comings of scribes. The later rabbinic understanding was that "He who robs

the widow and the orphan is as if he has robbed God himself." [6]

For the sake of appearance [they] say long prayers: Long prayers are not the problem, but saying them for the sake of appearance robs the prayer of its meaning. See Matthew 6:5-6.

41. *the treasury:* Either a) "thirteen trumpet shaped chests placed round the walls of the court of Women in which the people threw their offerings" or b) the treasury itself where "donors had to declare the amount of their gift and the purpose for which it was intended to the priest in charge, everything being visible and audible to the onlooker through the open door." [7]

42. *two small copper coins, which are worth a penny:* The coins are lepton, the smallest Jewish coin worth about one-eighth of a penny. Two sparrows were sold for a penny, so one of these coins would be worth only 1/16th of a sparrow.

43. *this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing:* In verse 44 the standard for making such an outrageous statement is that *proportionately* the rich gave a small portion of their wealth, while the widow gave everything she had. Still, worth as little as they were giving these two coins was really giving nothing. She could not "live on" what she had. The point is not that she impoverished herself, she was impoverished already, but that poor as she was she put her hope in God, not in accumulating wealth, while those who strove to accumulate wealth put their hope in their efforts and in the wealth they had accumulated.

The placement of the pericope next to the accusation against the scribes for devouring widows' houses may cause us to wonder why this widow was so poor. Also, the widow, in her poverty, does what the man in Mark 10:21f. would not do. Did Jesus, by praising her call her away from her life in poverty, and make himself responsible for her maintenance in the future? He would have had responsibility for all those who had become his disciples.

Reflection

Elijah demanded that a widow provide for his needs before providing for her own son. Jesus, the Son of God, praised a widow who placed her trust in God and her possessions in the Temple treasury. The psalmist urges us not to put our trust in human power, but rather to turn to the Lord who watches over those who have no rights and sets the prisoner free. Christ did this by entering the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf and offering himself for the sins of many.

We know we have no hope on the day of wrath except in the grace of God in Christ. We live both in the end of time, and also, by anticipation, in the Kingdom of God. Do we dare to submit ourselves totally to God's loving care for us?

Hymns [8]

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

323 ~E~O Lord of Light,

404 ~D~As Saints of

692v ~I~For All the Faithful

244 ~II~Lord Our God,

727s ~II~The King of

406 ~G~Take My Life,

411 ~G~Lord of All

397, 408, 836s, 27

Prayers of the People [9]

God, we say, "What have I to give. I have so little. It is not worth much." You remind us of our wealth; our relationships, even that between a man and a woman; the news about Christ who is to come again; maybe a loaf of bread or a hamper at the food bank; possibly words and deeds of encouragement and community to one lonely. Even a few coins, you bless and make fruitful. Help us to give all that we can of what we have. God who calls us to give **hear our prayer**.

Open our eyes, Creator of all that is, to the opportunities for service in and through our Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Bless our giving to Global Hunger and Development.

We pray that it might meet the challenge for world wide and local needs through our synods, Canadian Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran World Federation and others locally and nationally. Bless the meeting of the Board of CLWR as they gather this next weekend. God who calls us to give **hear our prayer.**

Or [10]

Presider or deacon

As we await the coming of the Lord let us offer prayers to God who bears the sins of many.

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 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 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, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

God of our ancestors, hear the prayers we offer this day and bring the riches of salvation to all who await you in poverty, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

1[1] Helmer Ringgren, [*chayah*], *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren). Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. IV, 1980, p. 340.

1[2] *Ibid.*, p. 339.

1[3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 6-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 553.

1[4] Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989, p. 262.

1[5] K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 182.

1[6] Exodus Rabba 30.8.

1[7] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1955, p. 396.

1[8] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1b9900.txt>

1[9] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt

1[10] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>