

Lent 5

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Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, our redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be your messengers of forgiveness and hope in the world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, that we may follow your commands and proclaim your reign of love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Isaiah 43:16-21

{16} Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, {17} who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: {18} Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. {19} I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. {20} The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, {21} the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

16. a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters: A reference to the deliverance at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22).

17. chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: The destruction of Pharaoh's chariot army (Exodus 14:23-28) is recounted in poetic style.

18. former things...things of old: These refer to the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea (verses 16-17).

19. a new thing...a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert: "Deutero-Isaiah had not the slightest intention of saying that the old traditions are abrogated, and that a new act of God is impending. What he wants to say is rather, 'stop mournfully looking back and clinging to the past, and open your minds to the fact that a new, miraculous act of God lies ahead of you!'" [1]

20-21. wild animals will honor me...you have been weary of me: Yahweh is acknowledged with respect by the animals, but not by the people he created to praise him. John 1:11 echoes this, "He came to what was his own and his own people did not accept him."

Psalms 126

{1} When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. {2} Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." {3} The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. {4} Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. {5} May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. {6} Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

"The people of God look back to Yahweh's great deeds and recall the glorious good fortune of a former time.... The change to the new state of all things...takes place in

history in the constantly new retrospects, petitions, and hopeful strides of the chosen people,” and finally, in the Gospel. [2]

2. *then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them"*: See also Psalms 44:14 and 79:10 for derogatory statements by the nations about Israel.

4. *the watercourses in the Negeb*: The “Negeb” “refers to one of the main regions of Palestine S of the hill country of Judah, W of the Arabah, and NE of the Sinai peninsula (see Gen 12:9; 13:1). The Hebrew word seems to mean ‘dry hill country.’”

[3] The “watercourses” are dry for most of the year, filling with water only during the rainy season. Here they are a sign pointing to the favor of Yahweh.

5-6: The myth of Baal included the scattering (sowing) of his body after his death, and involved mourning on the part of those who sowed the crop. This was not a part of Israel’s thinking, but it lies behind the imagery

Philippians 3:4b-14

{4b} If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: *{5}* circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; *{6}* as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. *{7}* Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. *{8}* More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ *{9}* and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. *{10}* I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, *{11}* if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. *{12}* Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. *{13}* Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, *{14}* I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Beare calls Philippians 3:2-4:1 “An Interpolated Fragment.” [4] Verses 2-11 include a warning against Jews (or Christian Jews?) (2-3), autobiographical material (4-6), the renunciation of everything for the sake of righteousness based on faith (7-10), “that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (11).

5-6: This is one of the few sources of autobiographical information about Paul.

7-9: Paul views knowing Christ as of more value than all of his genealogical advantages.

10-11: It is Paul’s desire to “know” Christ and the power of his resurrection.

12 *this...it*: “Life eternal—the resurrection from the dead—is now viewed as the prize which will be awarded to the winner.” [5] The imagery of the race continues through verse

13. *forgetting what lies behind*: Perhaps there is a connection with the first lesson, “Do not remember the former things....” In the text itself it refers to verses 4-7.

what lies ahead: A righteousness that “comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith” (verse 9). The criterion for a righteous life have changed. In Ezekiel it was a fruitful yield of justice and righteousness. In the Psalm it seems to be grounded in Yahweh’s action in bringing the vine out of Egypt and planting and nurturing it. Now, in the second lesson identification with the vine (the people of Israel) and blameless under the law are not of significance. Only knowing and

believing in the Lord Jesus leads to the prize of the heavenly call of God, the resurrection from the dead.

14. *goal*: “The verb *teteleiomai*...belongs to the terminology of the mysteries.... the highest grade was called *teleios*—perfect.” [6] It is not a question of moral perfection or sinlessness, but rather instruction and initiation. Perhaps a better translation would be “adept.”

John 12:1-8

{1} Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. {2} There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. {3} Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. {4} But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, {5} "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" {6} (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) {7} Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. {8} You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

1. six days before the Passover: A week before the Passover, the fourteenth day of the first month, the night of the full moon.

Bethany: Bethany is the village of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, 11:1; 12:2, 3.

Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead: The story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11: 1-45) is unique to the Gospel of John.

2-3. Martha served, and Lazarus was...at table with him. Mary...anointed Jesus' feet: Luke 10:40 tells another story about Mary and Martha. Jesus' resurrection is anticipated by the recollection of Lazarus' resurrection. Mark (14:3-9), Matthew (26:6-13), and Luke (7:36-50) also tell a story of a woman who anoints Jesus feet and wipes them with her hair, but the connection with this story is obscure.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume: In Ephesians 5:2 Paul describes Jesus' self-sacrifice as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Philippians 4:18: the gifts to Paul from the Philippians are “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.” 2 Corinthians 2:14, God, “spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of [Jesus] everywhere.” Mary's act of love and devotion are like the fragrant odor of sacrifice; it spreads everywhere and makes her act known throughout the world. In Mark 14:9, it is said of the unnamed workman who anoints Jesus, “wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

4-6: Judas objects to what he calls waste. Jesus dismisses his objection and the author describes Judas as a thief who stole from the common funds of Jesus and his disciples.

7. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial: Mary has anointed Jesus in anticipation of his burial, though she did not know it.

8. You always have the poor with you: Deuteronomy 15:11: “For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land.” If we keep in mind the source of the saying in Deuteronomy, the one who anoints Jesus is not thereby excused from caring for the poor; nor are those who witness the anointing excused.

you do not always have me: A reference to Jesus' impending death and departure. This is the point of the passage: Jesus is going to his death. Mary's act is prophetic.

Reflection

As we approach Good Friday Jesus death is foreshadowed by his anointing by Mary, the brother of Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. Israel, too, found new life when Yahweh restored her after her exile in Babylon. Those who find life in the midst of death are filled with joy. But our joy is not in our accomplishments, but rather in the undeserved goodness of God, who not only calls us to new life in Christ, but enables us to bring life to others.

Hymns [7]

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

457/8 --E--Jesus, Priceless

655v --P--As the Sun

408 --D--God, Whose Giving

482 --II--When I Survey

298 --D--One There Is,

344, 107, 810s, 96, 106, 224

727v --I--Lord, Your Hands

Prayers of the People [8]

P or A: Mary, a faithful follower of Christ, gave richly of herself in anointing the feet of Jesus out of love for him. Like Mary, inspire us to dedicate our lives to you. May the prayers that we lift to the Lord reflect this sincere devotion, praying in Jesus' name, and responding, "**Amen.**"

A: You have washed away our old lives of sin in the waters of baptism. We praise you, O God, for freeing us and making us new and holy in Christ Jesus. That we may know and walk in baptismal grace each day of our lives, in Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: Your Son taught us that the poor would always be with us to serve and assist. May our church outreach and social programs, community food banks, and shelters heed the challenge of extending assistance and friendship to those in need of hope. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: We pray for this congregation, that our relationships would be governed by love, grace and forgiveness. Free us from our inclination to keep score of good deeds done and wrongs committed. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: Comfort the sick and dying with your presence and peace. Especially do we pray for _____. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: You have the power to transform all things old and dull into things new and bright. We pause in silence to reflect on those areas in our lives which need your transforming power. (silence). Forgive us and renew us. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

P: "Those who go out weeping shall come home with shouts of joy." We bless your name and commend our prayers to you, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or [9]

Presider or deacon

As we press on toward the goal, let us earnestly offer prayers to God through Jesus Christ.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all

the holy people of God.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsors(s).

For all the peoples of the earth and for mercy, justice, and peace.

For the sick and the suffering, and for all who are in danger or need.

For the dying and the dead.

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

Blessed are you, God of eternal life, who made a way for us in the wilderness. Receive the prayers we offer this day and invite your people to the paschal feast. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

[1] Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969, p. 128.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-160: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 451.

[3] Steven A. Rosen, "Negeb," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (ed. by David Noel Freedman), New York: Doubleday, 1992, vol. 4, p. 1061.

[4] F.W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959, p. 28.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[7] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1c0001.txt>

[8] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

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