

Lent 6

Home Up

April 13, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take our flesh upon him and to suffer death on the cross. Grant that we may share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Isaiah 50:4-9a

{4} The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens-- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. {5} The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. {6} I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. {7} The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; {8} he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. {9} It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

The third of the Servant Songs in Isaiah. The word "servant" is not used in this passage, but "the similarity of this passage with the second 'Song', together with the use of the first person sing., leaves no doubt that it belongs to the same series." [1] Whybray identifies the Servant of Yahweh with the author of this part of the book of Isaiah, [2] but in the text the Servant remains anonymous.

4. *the tongue of a teacher*: Literally, "the tongue of those who are taught." This fits better with the second use of "those who are taught" at the end of the verse. The Servant is a pupil who is instructed by Yahweh each day.

5-6: The lessons learned are lessons in humiliation. He is scourged, humiliated (pulling out or shaving the beard), insulted and spit on by his captors. Last Sunday Hebrews said that Jesus learned obedience through suffering.

7: The Servant declares his confidence that Yahweh will help him, that he will not be shamed.

8-9: "The language of these verses is that of the law court." [3] Verse 8 suggests that the servant "had been arrested by the Babylonian authorities and put on trial.... Deutero-Isaiah accepts his sufferings willingly, does not complain about them.... He is confident that Yahweh is on his side, and that he will vindicate him." [4] No one will dare to declare him guilty in the face of Yahweh's help.

Psalms 31:9-16

{9} Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. {10} For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. {11} I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. {12} I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. {13} For I hear the whispering of many-- terror all around!-- as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. {14} But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." {15} My times are in your hand; deliver

me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. {16} Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

9-12: The singer is in psychological distress. Grief and sorrow rather than physical illness are the cause of his/her misery.

12. *a broken vessel*: Jeremiah 22:28; 48:38; Jeconiah the king and the country of Moab are likened to broken pots.

13. *they scheme together against me...to take my life*: The psalmist's enemies plot against his life.

terror all around: In Jeremiah 20 "Terror-all-around" is the name Jeremiah gave to the high priest Pashhur, who had put him in the stocks for prophesying against Jerusalem. See also Jeremiah 6:25; 20:10; 46:25; 49:29. The phrase seems to be an expression of pervasive fear.

15. *My times are in your hand*: The singer places him/herself in Yahweh's hand, and prays that Yahweh will deliver him/her.

deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors: By acting to deliver the singer Yahweh restores his/her honor.

16. *Let your face shine upon your servant*: A recollection of the Aaronic benediction, Numbers 6:24f. It is a metaphor of Yahweh's saving favor (Pss. 4:6; 31:16; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135; Daniel 9:17).

steadfast love: Sometimes translated "covenant loyalty."

As a response to the first lesson the Psalm pleads for rescue from enemies who are plotting the psalmist's death. The singer put his trust in Yahweh for deliverance and salvation.

Philippians 2:5-11

{5} Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, {6} who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, {7} but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, {8} he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross. {9} Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, {10} so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, {11} and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

5-11: The *Carmen Christi*. The mind that is supposed to indwell the Christians in Philippi is the mind described in this song, a mind of humility and obedience and self-denial. [5]

6. *he was in the form of God*: Greek *morphe*, "form" implies that Jesus had the essential attributes of God. There are similar expressions in 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.

something to be exploited: Literally, "did not regard it as a prize," a treasure to be held on to at all costs, like the treasure in the field in Matthew 13:44. The phrase means protecting something one has, while the translation "exploited" suggests the use of a possession for an inappropriate benefit. The point is not that Jesus misused his deity for selfish ends, but that instead of insisting on his divine prerogatives he "emptied himself."

7. *emptied himself*: Greek *kenosis*, to make empty. Russian Christianity has emphasized this "kenotic" doctrine of the Incarnation. G. P. Fedotov writes, "The ideal of the literal imitation of Christ in his poverty and humiliation on earth is an apprehension of religious genius which was to mold permanently the mentality of the Russian people...." [6]

being born in human likeness: In Genesis 1:26 God created humanity in his image and likeness.

found in human form: skemati, form, external shape and appearance, rather than nature.

8: Even in his death Jesus was in charge.

9. *God also highly exalted him*: The self-humbled, obedient Jesus was highly honored in the presence of human beings by being named, by God, Son of God.

the name that is above every name: A reference to the "name" of God, as in Exodus 3:15. The "name" is the tetragrammaton, [YHWH "Yahweh"]. This name is translated in the Septuagint with the Greek word, *kurios*, "Lord". In verse 11 every tongue is to confess Jesus Christ is *Lord*.

10. *at the name of Jesus*: Literally, "in the name of Jesus." It is through Jesus that the creation worships the Creator.

Mark 15:1-39 [40-47]

{1} As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. {2} Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." {3} Then the chief priests accused him of many things. {4} Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." {5} But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. {6} Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. {7} Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. {8} So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. {9} Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" {10} For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. {11} But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. {12} Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" {13} They shouted back, "Crucify him!" {14} Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" {15} So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. {16} Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. {17} And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. {18} And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" {19} They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. {20} After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. {21} They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. {22} Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). {23} And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. {24} And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. {25} It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. {26} The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." {27} And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. {29} Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, {30} save yourself, and come down from the cross!" {31} In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. {32} Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him. {33} When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. {34} At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" {35} When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is

calling for Elijah." {36} And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." {37} Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. {38} And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. {39} Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" {40} There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. {41} These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. {42} When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, {43} Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. {44} Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. {45} When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. {46} Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. {47} Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

The chapter can be divided into five sections: 1-15, the trial before Pilate; 16-20, torture by the soldiers; 21-36, the act of crucifixion; 37-39, Jesus' death; 40-47, the burial.

2. *Are you the king of the Jews?* Pilate is not concerned with religious questions. His sole concern is whether Jesus is a threat to the Roman Empire, whether he is a pretender to the throne of Israel.

3. *the chief priests accused him of many things:* "An important part of status degradation is the revisionist interpretation of a person's past to show that he was evil all along. Thus Jesus is charged with 'many things'...yet Mark mentions none of the charges aside from Pilate's initial question implying that Jesus was said to have proclaimed himself a royal Messiah (15:2)." [7]

7. *Barabbas:* "Throughout Mark we have seen Jesus as the honored Son of God. Now in a note of supreme irony, the rulers and crowd cry out for Barabbas (literally, 'son of the father,' a Hellenized form of the Aramaic name *Bar 'Abba*). A murderer and Jesus have switched roles. Jesus' degradation, affirmed by all present (v. 13), is now complete." [8]

10. *he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over:* In Mark 14:61f. the high priest asked Jesus if he was the Messiah and he responded, "Yes." Pilate's concern was whether his Messiahship was a threat to the empire. By this time he was convinced that Jesus was no political threat, so he sought to release him.

15. *Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas...handed [Jesus] over to be crucified:* The priests stage managed the crowd to demand Barabbas. Pilate's judgment was motivated by expediency not justice.

19. *They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him:* See Isaiah 50:6.

21. *Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus:* "The fact that Simon is described, without further explanation, as the father of Alexander and Rufus shows that all three, or at least the sons, were known to Mark and his readers." [9]

to carry his cross: Simon was compelled to accept Jesus' demand from Mark 8:34.

23. *wine mixed with myrrh:* A Jewish custom based on Proverbs 31:6.

24. *they...divided his clothes among them:* "The garments of the condemned were the perquisites of the soldiers who guarded the cross." [10]

26: Though Pilate knew better Jesus was crucified as a threat to the State.

27. *bandits:* "The Greek term used here by Mark (*lēstai*) is consistently employed by Josephus to describe the phenomenon of social banditry," a Robin Hood sort of brigandage

caused by the marginalization of the poor. [11]

31. *He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe:* The irony of the ridicule is that it is precisely true: "He saved others; he cannot save himself." That's the whole point, if he were to save himself, then he could not save others. If the mockers had eyes of faith they would be able to see the new thing God is doing and believe.

33: There was darkness from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). "Surrounding Jesus' death are a number of cosmic signs indicative of God's presence: the darkness over all the land (v. 33), the tearing of the Temple curtain (revealing the forbidden Holy of Holies to one and all, v. 38)." [12]

34-36. *At three o'clock:* Jesus' cried out words from Psalm 22:1 in Aramaic. Mark translated the words for the benefit of his Greek-speaking readers. "The depths of the saying are too deep to be plumbed, but the least inadequate interpretations are those which find in it a sense of desolation in which Jesus felt the horror of sin so deeply that for a time the closeness of His communion with the Father was obscured." [13]

Jesus was crucified at 9:00 a.m. ("the third hour," verse 25); he died after 3:00 p.m.

39. *Truly this man was God's Son!* What God had said at Jesus' baptism is recognized by the centurion.

The Servant in the first lesson was tortured by his/her enemies, but escaped shame and disgrace because (s)he was helped by God. Jesus was not only tortured, but humiliated, disgraced, shamed, and victimized by religious authority which could not understand the new thing that God was doing.

Reflection

This Sunday embraces themes of both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday, the Gospel and Psalm 118 reflecting the former, and the first and second lessons, the latter. The two themes are not in opposition to each other, but rather two sides of the same reality. Jesus' triumph over the powers of evil in the world is accomplished through his Passion. Jesus' Passion contains within it the reality of his triumph.

Through the season of Lent the first lessons have been grouped around various expressions of God's covenant with his people: Noah, Abraham, Sinai, the new covenant. On this last Sunday in Lent the expression of God's relationship with his people is reflected by the Suffering Servant. The Servant knows that God is with him and than in spite of his suffering he is not disgraced. Jesus accepted the role of suffering servant for our sake, taking upon himself the burden of our sins, and reconciling us with God. The full weight of human disobedience and rebellion on Jesus is shown by his cry of dereliction, for he fully felt the loss of God that would have been ours save for his obedience to the Father's will. As Barabbas switched places with Jesus and was allowed to go free, so we, too, have been set free by his sacrifice.

Hymns [14]

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

108 --E--All Glory, Laud,
94 --D--My Song is Love
124/ --D--The Royal Banners
179 --II--At the Name
728s--II--A Stable Lamp

116/7--G--O Sacred Head,
661v --G--My Song Is
727s, 121, 799s, 92,
740v/740s, 631v, 668v

Prayers of the People [15]

A: The Passover crowd gave ready welcome to its Messiah with palm branches and shouts of praise. We take up their joyful cry, saying "All hail most worthy Son of God," and respond, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the ecumenical church.

P: May there be one voice of praise that is lifted in all worship gatherings, O Christ. Heal the festering sores of jealousy, fracture, and separation. Turn aside factionalism that denies the cross and the agony of your death for sin. Reclaim our full allegiance and grant works of mercy born of your love. All hail, most worthy Son of God. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those countries that prohibit the gospel and the church. P: Enable those who teach, proclaim, and demonstrate the message of Christ to do so in non-offensive, attractive ways. Inspire those who fear the Word to investigate it, that the integrity and truth of Christ might be known and welcomed. All hail, most worthy Son of God. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those confronting death.

P: Surround the dying with compassionate and skillful comforters, God of all comfort. Permit such settlement of affairs that will bring an easy mind. Let pardon in Christ be known and cherished. Let departure from this life be attended by the entrusting of self to you. All hail, most worthy Son of God. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those newborn in our congregation.

P: We welcome _____, the child of _____ . We ask for good health, ready growth, and a life in the community of the faithful. All hail, most worthy Son of God. C: Amen.

P: Open our hearts O God of Heaven, to the solemn joys of this Holy Week and renew our faith in Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our salvation. C: Amen.

Or [16]

Presider or deacon

As we journey this week with Christ and celebrate the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, let us earnestly pray to God for those following the way of the cross and for all peoples everywhere.

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 nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families. For justice, mercy, and peace in all the world. For all who are tempted, oppressed, afflicted, or in need. For the dying and the dead, and for those who mourn.

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

Presider

Blessed are you, Lord our God, who sent your Son among us to bear the pain and grief of humankind. Receive the prayers we offer this day for all those in need in every place and as we near the holy mountain grant us strength on our journey.

Glory to you for ever.

Notes

[1] R.N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*. Greenwood, SC, 1975, p. 150.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

[5] For a detailed examination of the song, and its interpretation, see R. P. Martin, *Carmen*

Christi: Philippians ii.5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship. Cambridge: University Press, 1967.

[6] Quoted in F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959, p. 82.

[7] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 275.

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1955, p. 588.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 589.

[11] Malina, *ibid.*, p. 270.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 276.

[13] Taylor, *ibid.*, p. 594.

[14] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

[15] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b1.txt

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