

Epiphany 3

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January 26, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you sent your Son to proclaim your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us with the power of your Spirit, that we, too, may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

{1} The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, {2} "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." {3} So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. {4} Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" {5} And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.... {10} When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

4: Though he really did not want to, Jonah did what Yahweh wanted and warned the Ninevites of the impending judgment they faced.

5. *the people of Nineveh believed God*: They put their trust in Yahweh, the God of a people they had abused. They turned from their evil ways and proclaimed a fast.

10. *When God saw...how they turned from their evil ways...God changed his mind*: The same verb is used for both turning from their evil ways and the changing of God's mind. The Ninevites changed their ways in the hope that God would do likewise (verse 9: "God may relent and change his mind...."). And he did!

The idea of God changing his mind (or "repenting") is explicitly mentioned in two other passages. Numbers 23:19 reflects the ancient understanding of God, namely that God does not vacillate like a human being. He will not change his mind. On the other hand, Jeremiah 26:13 holds out the possibility of God changing his mind if the people will obey God. The classic passage is the discussion between Yahweh and Abraham over the fate of Sodom in Genesis 18:16-33. Abraham gradually persuades Yahweh to consider changing his mind about destroying the city if as few as ten righteous people are found in the city.

Psalms 62:5-12

{5} For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. {6} He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. {7} On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. {8} Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah {9} Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. {10} Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them. {11} Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, {12} and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.

As a response to the first lesson, the Psalm views absolute reliance on God as an essential quality for one who serves Yahweh. Leaving the rest of the book of Jonah to

the side, in the pericope, Jonah could be said to illustrate such dependence. In the face of the power of the Babylonians Jonah dares to call them to account, and against all expectation and hope they believe him and repent.

[1-4]: Omitted in the lectionary, verses 3-4 refer to persecutions suffered by the singer. Verses 1-2 are repeated, in a slightly different form, in verses 5-6.

5. *God: 'Elohim.* "In the Elohistically edited part of the Psalter [1] we should here probably read [yhwh, Yahweh] instead of [elohim, God]." [2]

my soul waits: In English this appears to be a simple quotation of verse 1. However, this verse would read literally, "For God alone, wait in silence my soul," a self-exhortation to put one's trust in Yahweh. In this verse and the next the singer declares his/her complete dependence on Yahweh.

7. *On God rests my deliverance and my honor:* Not only the survival of the singer, but his/her honor also depends on God rather than him/her-self. This results from the singer's position as a courtier in Yahweh's court.

8-10: The singer calls on the people also to place their trust in Yahweh.

9. *Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion...they are together lighter than a breath:* This is a periphrastic translation. The two kinds of people are *children of man* and *sons of men*. They are the psalmist's enemies from verses 3-4, not different social or economic classes of people. "In the verdict of Yahweh's judgment they prove to be (even in all their power) ineffectual and frail, their imposing appearance is all lie and deception." [3]

10: The persecutors are encouraged not to put their confidence in the rewards of wickedness.

11. The singers refers to an oracle (s)he has heard, not once but twice: "There is protection with Yahweh."

12. The psalmist addresses God with confidence in spite of what seemed like the overwhelming power of his/her persecutors.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

{29} I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, {30} and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, {31} and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. For the present form of this world is passing away.

The context of this reading is married life. The point is not that those who are married, or about to marry should repudiate their marriages, but that they must recognize that their relationship will soon be entirely different, for "when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mark 12:25).

29. *the appointed time has grown short:* not "a special shortening of time, only that time is running out and there is little left." [4]

30. *as though they had none...were not:* J.D.M. Darrett's interpretation describes the actions of people involved in the accomplishment of a marriage: "those who mourn" are the bride's family losing their daughter/sister; "those who rejoice," the groom's family and their gain; "those who buy," the groom's family who must pay the bride price; "those who deal with the world," the bride's family who negotiate a suitable bride-price. [5]

31. *the present form of this world is passing away:* Social, economic and civil structures are impermanent. Romans 13:11: "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers...." At all times Christians should live oriented toward eternity rather than toward this impermanent world and its concerns.

Mark 1:14-20

{14} Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, {15} and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." {16} As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. {17} And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." {18} And immediately they left their nets and followed him. {19} As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. {20} Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

15: This verse anticipates the flashback in Mark 6:16-29, where Herod recalls that he had beheaded John.

15. *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near*: Jesus' preaching is very similar to that of John. The kingdom of God with its blessings and requirements is impinging on the world. Now everything must be ordered by that reality.

16, 19: Simon, James and John whom (with Andrew) Jesus first called have an important place in the company of disciples. See, for example, Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33.

17. *I will make you fish for people*: In Jeremiah 16:16 Yahweh will send fishers and hunters who are charged with catching and capturing the exiles to return them to the land of Israel. Jesus' disciples will have a similar task, to catch people of Israel and bring them home to the kingdom of God. What Jesus has done with respect to these four individuals, they will, in turn, be doing with respect to others, that is, recruiting them to the kingdom of God.

18. *immediately they left their nets and followed him*: The activities of the world are not as important as the call of Jesus who announced the nearness of the kingdom. A "break with one's social network (family, patrons, friends, neighbors) [was] considered abnormal behavior and would have been much more traumatic in antiquity than simply leaving behind one's job and tools." [6]

19. *James son of Zebedee and his brother John*: James and John are also fishermen. In two weeks they are guests in Simon and Andrew's home in Capernaum.

20. *immediately*: A word constantly used in Mark as a connective. It has the force of "next," or "then," or "so."

Reflection

The lessons point to the great life changes that commitment to Jesus, and to the Father require; not because change is required for that commitment to be acceptable, but because making that commitment will of necessity produce great changes in one's life. Some of those changes may be expected and desired, others may not. But they will come nevertheless, and we will accept them, or our commitment will falter.

The time is upon us. The present form of this world is passing away. We don't know what form it will take. For that we have to put our faith in God. It may be what we expect, but more likely it will not. Although Jonah's petulance is not a part of the first lesson today, it is nevertheless a natural response to God's sovereignty. What we must remember is that what is "natural" for human beings is, by definition, contrary to God.

In the Prayer of the Day we ask that we "may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive." May God give us the further gift, that we may not resent them when they accept it.

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

400 --E--God, Whose
455 --D--"Come, Follow"
724s --P--My Soul in
366 --II--Lord of Our

465 --G--Evening and
784v --G--You Have Come
Down
177, 738s, 798s, 389, 183

Prayers of the People [8]

A: Whether untutored or schooled, God calls us beyond ourselves to full service in the kingdom. We petition, "O gracious God who summons," and respond, C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For the church: stir hearts everywhere to answer the call to serve as trained pastors in our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, that, equipped for ministry, each may be a bearer of good news to the lost and straying. O Gracious God who summons. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For the nations, that they may now turn from reprisals, violence, and destruction and allow their people to enjoy the benefits of peace. O gracious God who summons. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For those entrusted with the care of money, that they may not be tempted to enrich themselves by fraud or other deceitful practice. O gracious God who summons. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For those who teach in our public schools, that they may understand their vocation as a sacred and worthy calling. O gracious God who summons. C: Hear us, we pray.

A: For those who face imminent death, that the Epiphany season may reveal to them the greater glory and awesome future that they share in the resurrection of Christ. O gracious God who summons. C: Hear us, we pray.

P: Your word speaks, O God of heaven; give us grace to hear. C: Amen.

Or [9]

Presider or deacon

The kingdom of God is near at hand. Let us earnestly call on God for the needs, concerns, and hopes of all peoples.

Deacon or other leader

For the church of Jesus Christ in every place.

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

For this holy gathering and for all who are called to follow Jesus.

For this country, for all nations and their leaders, and for those who guard the peace.

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 those we love.

Presider

God of infinite mercy, hear the prayers of your people and stir up our souls with longing to embrace your gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] The part of the Psalter in which *Elohim* is used to refer to God rather than the name *Yahweh* includes Psalms 42-72, 84-89.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 12.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

- [4] C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968, p. 176.
- [5] J.D.M. Derrett, "The Disposal of Virgins," *Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. 1, pp. 190-191.
- [6] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 179.
- [7] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>
- [8] http://www.worship.ca/text/inter_b1.txt
- [9] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>