

Epiphany 4



Prayer of the Day

O God, you know that we cannot withstand the dangers which surround us. Strengthen us in body and spirit so that, with your help, we may be able to overcome the weakness that our sin has brought upon us; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord.

Jeremiah 1:4-10

{4} Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, {5} "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." {6} Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." {7} But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, {8} Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." {9} Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. {10} See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

5. Before I formed you...before you were born: Isaiah acknowledged that he had been called before he was born (Isaiah 49:1). Of John the angel of the Lord said, "even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15). Jesus, too, was declared to be holy before he was born (Luke 1:35).

6. Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy: Others also made excuses when they are told of God's plans for them. Sarah; "After I have grown old and my husband is old shall I have pleasure?" (Genesis 18:12). Moses; "I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Gideon; "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (Judges 6:15). Jonah; "Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3). Isaiah; "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). Zechariah; "I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years" (Luke 1:18). But Yahweh does not allow any excuses. What Yahweh demands he provides the means for.

7-8: Yahweh declares that it has been determined that Jeremiah "shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you." Jeremiah is commanded not to be afraid of opposition because Yahweh will be with him.

9. the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth: A seraph touched Isaiah's mouth with a coal from the temple altar (Isaiah 6:6-7). Yahweh commanded Ezekiel to eat a scroll (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). Yahweh's action makes the prophet a fit instrument for the delivery of Yahweh's words.

10. to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant: Jeremiah's task is both destructive and constructive; after pulling down he is to build up.

Psalms 71:1-6

{1} In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. {2} In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. {3} Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. {4} Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. {5} For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. {6} Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.

1. In you, O Lord, I take refuge: The singer has fled to the Temple for asylum and protection

for his/her enemies. The psalmist is "old" (verse 9); his enemies believe that Yahweh has given him up (verse 11).

3. *a rock...a strong fortress*: "Yahweh himself is the 'eternal rock' (Pss. 31:3; 42:9). To him as the 'fortress,' 'shield,' and 'horn' all those who are in distress and danger flee for refuge" (See especially Psalm 18:1-2). [1] "The poet cites Ps. 31:1-3, or a conventional formulation, as it was used upon entry to the asylum." [2]

4. *the hand of the wicked...the grasp of the unjust and cruel*: This is the danger faced by the psalmist, from which he seeks refuge.

6. *Upon you have I leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb*: The singer has depended on Yahweh from birth, apparently without disappointment. See also Psalm 22:9-10.

My praise is continually of you: The enduring quality of the poet's praise is also referred to in verses 14-15, 17-18, 24.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

{1} If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. {2} And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. {3} If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. {4} Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant {5} or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; {6} it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. {7} It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. {8} Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. {9} For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; {10} but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. {11} When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. {12} For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. {13} And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Chapter 12 ends with these words: "And I will show you a still more excellent way." This is not a "way" of gifts or offices; it leads beyond spiritual gifts. Christ commanded us, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself.... Love your enemies." Love is the *way* of the Christian; and it generates the spiritual gifts (verse 14:1).

1-3: Love is greater than the gifts of "tongues," both worldly and spiritual languages, prophetic powers, knowledge, faith. "Paul follows the Corinthian order of merit in the spiritual gifts, which he will reverse in chap. 14. In doing so he emphasizes prophecy more strongly than speaking with tongues." [3]

hand over my body so that I may boast: The text reads *kauthesomai*, "I burn." *kauchesomai*, "I boast," is a variant. Both may refer to martyrdom or self-immolation as an ascetic act, "which was reckoned a particularly glorious act in the Graeco-Roman world.... Neither is a demonstration of the true Christian." [4]

4-7. *Love*: Greek, "...*agape* is treated simply as a human virtue without any reference to Christology... —whether it is God's love for man, or man's love for God or for his fellow. It is simply the description of an abstract virtue, like the praise of wisdom in the wisdom literature." [5]

"[*makrothumein*] means (a) 'to have patience,' (b) 'to be long-suffering.'.... [*chresteuesthai*], 'to show oneself kind,' occurs only in Christian literature. [*dzylon*], 'to be zealous, jealous,' has long been used in a good and a bad sense. [*perpereuesthai*]: [*perperos*] is the braggart; the word is explained by Hesychius as meaning ...'vaunt oneself.' [*ou dzetai ta eautes*], 'does not seek its own advantage'; cf. 10:24, 33; Phil 2:21. [*paroxynein*] is in itself neutral, 'incite,' but points predominantly in the direction of inciting to wrath. The meaning of [*logidzesthai*] here corresponds to [*hashav*], 'to set to

someone's account.' For the antithesis of [*aletheia*], 'truth,' and [*adikia*], 'wrongdoing,' cf. Rom 1:18; 2:8; 2 Thess 2:12. Verse 7 is formally speaking a conclusion, but in content a verbal description of the triad of v. 13. [*stegein*]: (a) 'draw a veil of silence over'; (b) 'bear.' The second meaning is to be preferred because of the analogous [*hupomenein*], 'endure.' [*pistis*], 'faith' in Judaism is related to 'hope.'" [6]

8. *Love never ends*: This anticipates verse 13, "these three abide (remain)." But prophecies will not *remain*. They will end. So will tongues and knowledge. Only faith, hope, love remain. "What Paul is driving at here emerges... in the next verse in the distinction between the transient and abiding aspects of these gifts." [7]

9-10: The gifts we are given by the Spirit are fragmentary. They will only last until the "perfect," the *telios*, which perfectly fits the present expression to the end result, comes.

11-12: Paul uses two examples to show how our present spiritual qualifications are fragmentary. They are childish, and mere reflections of reality. In God we are known in love and we come to know his love fully, completely and totally. There is an expression of this relationship between God and a man in Numbers 12:8 which is the basis for the rabbinic assertion that seeing in a glass means 'to see prophetically,' and that Moses needed only one mirror to see God while other prophets needed nine because they saw in clouded mirrors. [8] This may be the model for the example in verse 12.

13. *faith, hope, and love abide*: "the three 'remaining' gifts are ones that cannot lead to pneumatic emancipation and self-edification. For faith and love are related to their object and existent only in this relationship, or rather *qua* this relationship. Faith is faith in..., love does not seek its own, and hope raises against fanaticism the eschatological reservation.... The preeminence of love can include the validity of faith and hope. It is only in this complexity that Paul can speak also of a 'way.' For this term really fits only for love." [9]

Luke 4:21-30

{21} Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." {22} All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" {23} He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" {24} And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. {25} But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; {26} yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. {27} There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." {28} When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. {29} They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. {30} But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

21. *Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*: Jesus has come to understand the call that was made explicit to him in his baptism and the words he heard spoken from heaven as the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah regarding the anointing by the Spirit of Yahweh. The reading repeats this verse which ended the Gospel last Sunday.

22. *All spoke well of him*: Initially the crowd accepted the claim to honor made by Jesus.

Is not this Joseph's son? "In asking if Jesus is Joseph's son, the synagogue participants are questioning how such honorable teaching could come from one born to a lowly artisan." [10]

23-27: "Jesus anticipates that they will press the matter (v.23) and offers a riposte in advance (v. 24), which he then illustrates from Scripture (vv. 25-27). His riposte is seriously insulting, however, posing the possibility that outsiders ('the nations' other than Israel) are better able to judge the honor of a prophet than those who know him best." [11]

28-30: "Jesus' negative challenge cannot go unanswered. The crowd is...not only not prepared to grant the worth being claimed but also...they felt totally dishonored by Jesus'

declarations. The death of the challenger is a worthy response to public dishonor...though an overquick resort to violence is often an unintended public admission of failure in the ever-present game of wits...." [12]

Comment: "...in biblical times honor meant everything, including survival.... Honor can be understood as the status one claims in the community together with the all-important recognition of that claim by others. It thus serves as an indicator of social standing.... Honor can be *ascribed* or *acquired*. Ascribed honor derives from birth.... Acquired honor, by contrast, is the result of skill in the never-ending game of challenge and response. Not only must one win to gain it; one must do so in public because the whole community must acknowledge the gain. To claim honor that the community does not recognize is to play the fool. Since honor is a limited good, if one person wins honor, someone else loses.... Challenges to one's honor could be positive or negative. Giving a gift is a positive challenge and requires reciprocation in kind. An insult is a negative challenge that likewise cannot be ignored. The game of challenge and response is deadly serious and can literally be a matter of life and death." [13]

Reflection

In the Gospel we are reminded that God's blessings are directed where, when and to whom God determines. Just as Jesus' townspeople were warned that they should not expect Jesus to do among them the wonders he had done elsewhere, so we, too, must be warned against expecting a *quid pro quo* for our faith. Frequently, God's people must be chastised more directly and strongly than others for their shortcomings, rather than be rewarded for their accomplishments.

Nevertheless, the Psalm assures us that God is our rock and fortress when we are in danger because we work to carry out our Father's intentions in the world. Lip service is not enough, only love, active and persistent will last. Everything else is empty and transitory.

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

315 --E--Love Divine, All
415 --D--God of Grace
510 --I--O God of Youth
792s --P--Thy Holy Wing
(741v)

336 --II--Jesus, Thy
665v --II--Ubi Caritas
233 --G--Thy Strong Word
802s, 317, 359, 551

Prayers of the People [15]

P or A: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, bringing redemption and healing to all who believe. We offer our thanks for this greatest of gifts in our prayers, praying, "God of love" and responding, "Hear our prayer."

A: That the members of your whole church may constantly praise you for your goodness--through worship, the proclamation of your gospel, and in active service toward you and one another. God of love. Hear...

A: That you may be a stronghold for those persecuted for proclaiming your name and righteousness in communities torn by injustice. God of love. Hear...

A: That bonds of love may break through walls of difference in our own congregation, bringing together in caring relationships people of varied age, gender, ethnicity, and spiritual maturity. God of love. Hear...

A: That committees and groups within this congregation be open to new membership and inspired ideas and visions. God of love. Hear...

A: That the sick and the dying may be delivered from their suffering. We pray especially for _____. God of love. Hear...

P: Bind our lives and prayers to you with your ever-present love, O Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Or [16]

Presider or deacon

Called to a life of faith, hope, and love, let us pray for all who need justice, mercy, and peace.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters, deacons, and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For this holy gathering and for all who enter with faith, reverence, and fear of God.

For this country, for all nations and their leaders, and for our community.

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, and for those who care for them.

For ourselves, our families, friends, and companions, and 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

God of the prophets, hear our prayers for all peoples and put your words in our mouths as we proclaim you to the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988, p. 259.

[2] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 72.

[3] Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975, p. 222.

[4] K. L. Schmidt, “[*kaio*, “to kindle, ‘to burn’],” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by G. Johannes Butteries and Helmet Rigger). Vol. III. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965, p. 467.

[5] Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the New Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1974, pp. 493-494. Also Conzelmann, *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224, “The subject is now [*agape*], ‘love,’ in personifying style. The content and style are not hymned, but didactic. They belong to a Jewish parenetic tradition.... The parallels show that no specific definitions of love are to be sought here either. It is a question of the ways of ‘love’ as such (naturally, in the world).”

[6] Conzelmann, *ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[8] Gerhard Kittle, “[*anima*],” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by G. Johannes Butteries and Helmet Rigger). Vol. I. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, p. 178.

[9] Conzelmann, *Ibid.*, p. 232.

[10] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 309.

[11] *Loc. cit.*

[12] *Loc. cit.*

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 309-310.

[14] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

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

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