

# Proper 9

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## Pentecost 7 July 7, 2002

### Prayer of the Day

God of glory and love peace comes from you alone. Send us as peacemakers and witnesses to your kingdom, and fill our hearts with joy in your promises of salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Zechariah 9:9-12

{9} Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. {10} He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. {11} As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. {12} Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

While it is generally agreed that chapters 9-14 were written by an author or authors different from chapters 1-8, there is no agreement as to the historical context of the chapters. There are two sections, 9-11 and 12-14 which seem to have functioned separately from each other. Chapters 9-11 have no structural unity. [1] Paul Hanson identifies Zechariah 9 as a "Divine Warrior Hymn." [2]

9. *on a donkey*: "The great significance often attached to the lowliness of the ass here in contrast to the horse is based on estimations foreign to the ancient Near East." [3]

10. *chariot...war horse*: A royal theology which embraces the chariot horse is a general near eastern theology; one which espouses the ass, or donkey is native to Israel. "...underlying the passage is a kingship ideal wherein the ass, rather than the horse and chariot, was the bearer of the king in the royal procession.... The contrast...accordingly is not between a royal image and an unroyal one, but between two royal images stemming from rival ideologies. The image in keeping with Israel's archaic institution of Holy War—which institution stands at the base of the hymn in Zech. 9—is the image of the ass as the bearer of the king.... in the language of symbolism we are informed that Israel's archaic ideal...would in the end-time triumph.... Jesus was hailed the long-awaited Davidic king as he entered the royal city...mounted on an ass.... The arrival of the eschaton is announced in the paradox of the king who triumphantly entered Jerusalem on an ass, only to be crucified days later...." [4]

11. *the blood of my covenant with you*: Cf. Exodus 24:8. This is the blood used by Moses to seal the covenant at Sinai.

*prisoners...the waterless pit*: Israelites oppressed by their enemies are likened to Joseph taken captive by his brothers and confined in a dry pit, Cf. Genesis 37:24. Jeremiah was also held in a dry well, cf. Jeremiah 38:6.

12. *I will restore to you double*: The penalty for theft, among other things, is to repay double what was stolen (Exodus 22:7). Israel has suffered loss at the hands of her enemies (Zechariah 9:1-8); Yahweh will restore double what she lost because of the covenant with them.

## Psalm 145:8-14

{8} The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. {9} The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. {10} All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you. {11} They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, {12} to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. {13} Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. {14} The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Psalm 145 is an alphabetic Psalm. Each verse begins with a letter of the alphabet. It belongs to the genre or category of "songs of praise." With the Psalm the congregation responds to the announcement that the King is coming.

8. *The Lord is gracious and merciful...*: The description of the Lord is first used in Exodus 34:6, and repeated in Psalm 103:8; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Jonah 4:2.

10-12: All creation will bless Yahweh and tell of God's power and the glory of God's kingdom to all people.

13-14: Yahweh's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Yahweh keeps his word and supports the oppressed.

"The principal term in Psalm 145 is [*malkuth* kingdom] (v. 13). In statements of praise the singer pays tribute to the great deeds of [*melek* king] Yahweh. (S)he renders homage to the majesty of the powerful and merciful God... Psalm 145 is an important milestone on the way to the NT proclamation of the [*basilea tou Theou*]." [5]

## Romans 7:15-25a

{15} I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. {16} Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. {17} But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. {18} For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. {19} For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. {20} Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. {21} So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. {22} For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, {23} but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. {24} Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? {25} Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

"...there is a wide consensus among interpreters that Paul uses the first person pronoun as a rhetorical device to do a theological analysis of the human condition from the perspective of Christian faith." [6]

15. *I do not understand my own actions*: "Paul can hardly mean, 'I do not know'; for the subject of the verb knows only too well what he does. It is not much more likely that the meaning is 'I do not understand'; for the subject of the verb is depicted in vv. 15-24 as having a very clear comprehension of his position. The best explanation is... 'I do not approve', 'I do not condone'." [7]

17. *it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me*: "This verse is not intended as an excuse, but is rather an acknowledgement of the extent to which sin dwelling in the Christian usurps control over his life." [8]

18. *my flesh*: Not the lower self in contrast to a higher self (e.g., the spirit), but "the whole fallen human nature as such." [9]

*I can will what is right, but I cannot do it*: "...even his best actions, in which he comes nearest to accomplishing the good he wills, are always stained and spoiled by his egotism." [10]

21. *I find it to be a law*: A norm, a regular pattern, a paradigm.

22. *my inmost self*: mind (verses 23, 25b). Cf. Romans 12:2, "...be transformed by the renewing of your minds...."

23. *another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin*: "...the

power, the authority, the control exercised over us by sin. It is a forceful way of making the point that the power which sin has over us is a terrible travesty, a grotesque parody, of that authority over us which belongs by right to God's holy law...a hideous usurpation of the prerogative of God's law." [11]

24. *this body of death*: "...the speaker's human nature in its condition of occupation by that 'other law' which is the usurping power of sin." [12]

25: "...an indirect answer to the question in v. 24." [13]

"Paul's analysis of the struggle between a person's will to serve God and his or her incapacity to follow through on it consistently can be illustrated in many ways. The constraints of time and the conflicting demands on us from so many directions seem to hem us in, along with our best intentions, making it impossible for us to be and do what God created us to be and do. And then there is sin, which makes matters even worse! But God, who created us, knows our condition well. Indeed, God has delivered us, and will deliver us, from our plight, does not condemn, and rejoices in our reliance on his grace." [14]

### **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

{16} But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, {17} 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' {18} For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; {19} the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds..... {25} At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; {26} yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. {27} All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. {28} "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. {29} Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. {30} For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

16. *this generation*: "If 'this generation' did not follow after John and Jesus, and if Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum did not acknowledge Jesus' miracles, there are still the 'babes' who perceive what is happening." [15]

25. *Lord of heaven and earth*: The phrase is not found in the Old Testament, and only here and in Luke 10:21 and Acts 7:24. The verse is a warning against the temptation to turn the faith into an intellectual discipline, whether of gnostic or practical character. God reveals himself to those who do not pretend to being recipients of revelation.

*these things*: The knowledge of the Father and the son, verse 27. This knowledge is relational, God's love, mercy, compassion, rather than descriptive, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient.

26: Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21.

27: Exodus 33:12-13: God knows Moses. Moses prays that he might know God. The capacity to receive revelation is not a mark of worthiness, but of the arbitrary choice of the Son. It frequently seems as though the gift of revelation is in an inverse relationship to one's character.

*the Son...the Father*: "The articles ('the' father, 'the' son) and the capital letters (the Father, the Son), which appear in the NRSV, are the result of reading this proverb in the light of John's Gospel. The capitals are not indicated in Matthew's story, while the articles in Greek stand for the generic categories of proverbs" [16] ("the" father, as a representative of fathers, "the" son, as a representative of sons).

28-30: *Pistis Sophia*, 95: "All ye who are heavy under your burden, come hither unto me, and I will quicken you; for my burden is easy and my yoke is light."

*Gospel of Thomas* 90: Jesus said, "Come unto Me, for My yoke is easy and My lordship is mild and you will find repose for yourselves."

30. *yoke*: 'metaphorically...what controls people as they make their way in life. Reciting and living the *Shema*' (Deuteronomy 6:4ff) was traditionally seen in Israelite Yahwism as "bearing the yoke of the kingdom of heaven." Jesus' yoke would be seeking God's favor in terms of the quality

and direction of life described by Jesus." [17]

"11:25-30 is a capsule summary of the message of the entire gospel. In this passage, Jesus reveals that he is the revealer. That is, he reveals that, as the meek and humble Son of the Father, he fulfills the calling of Israel, embodying in his own person Torah and Wisdom and thus making known the perfect will of God." [18]

## Reflection

Though we delight in the law of God, we are captive to the law of sin, and cannot free ourselves. Though we cannot rescue ourselves from this body of death, we have been rescued by Christ. We are blessed. We strive, we fail, we confess, and we are blessed again.

Last week we celebrated the Fourth of July, Independence Day, a day for remembrance and celebration of the founding of our nation. It is too simplistic either to embrace the secular festival or to reject it. In what sense can our relationship to our nation become an image of the relationship between believers and their Lord? Does our relationship with God, and our membership in the Kingdom of God provide a model for our citizenship in our earthly country, and our relationship to the principles of liberty and justice for all that are its fundamental qualities?

## Hymns [19]

*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

475 E--Come, Gracious Spirit,

777s E--God Is Here! (719v)

480 D--Oh, that the

353 II--May We Your

298 G--One There Is,

439 G--What a Friend

305, 497, 505, 425

## Prayers of the People [20]

P or A: Guided by the lamp of God's Word, let us pray for the needs of all and the peace of the world, saying, "Hear our prayer," and responding, "Light our path."

A: As the ELCIC national convention closes in Regina, we ask for God's blessing on the decisions that have been made in good faith and care for the life of the church and the world, and for unity and energy for renewed discipleship. Hear our prayer. Light our path.

A: We pray for Bishop Telmor, for the National Church Council and staff who will work with the priorities and tasks decided by the church in convention. Give them vision and satisfaction in the work to be accomplished and all members of the church a sense of ownership and responsibility for the mission of Christ. Hear our prayer. Light our path.

A: We pray for families, that there may be a sense of unity and common purpose in their life. May love rule in our homes. May respectful family life be one of the foundations of the life of your church, making all people, young or old, single or married, welcome and secure within the family of God. Hear our prayer. Light our path.

A: As the needs of the vulnerable and the weak become apparent make our society immediately responsive for their protection and care. May the sick be treated in such a way that promotes their healing and peace of mind. We remember particularly \_\_\_\_\_. Hear our prayer. Light our path.

A: Bless the fields that were sown with seasonable weather and growth and may faith also grow among us and within us. Hear our prayer. Light our path.

P: May the God-pleasing Spirit of Christ live in us. Grant our prayers according to your abundant mercy and love for your creation. Let us live in the power of Christ's resurrection, in his name we pray. Amen.

Or [21]

*Presider or deacon*

All who are weary and heavy burdened, come let us offer prayers to our God and Father.

*Deacon or other leader*

For this holy gathering and for the people of God in every place.

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For mercy, peace, and justice in the world, and for our armed forces everywhere.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, the poor and the oppressed, prisoners and their families.

For the dying and the dead.

For all those captive to sin.

For ourselves, our families, our companions, and all those we love.

Lifting our voices with all creation, with the blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

Lord of heaven and earth, hear the prayers we offer today, teach us the secrets of your heart, and give us rest from our trials; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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## Notes

[1] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, pp. 475; 480-481.

[2] Paul D. Hanson, "Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an Ancient Ritual Pattern," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 92(1973)37.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 43-45.

[5] Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 549.

[6] Arland J. Hultgren, "God's Saving Work in the Letter to the Romans: Lectionary Texts for the Pentecost Season," *Word and World* 13(1993)184-190.

[7] C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, I:358-359.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 360.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 361.

[10] *Loc. cit.*

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 364.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 366.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 368.

[14] Hultgren, *ibid.*, p. 190.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 272.

[16] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 94.

[17] *Loc. cit.*

[18] W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991, II:296.

[19] <http://www.worship.ca/text/rcla0102.txt>

[20] [http://www.worship.ca/text/int\\_a2.txt](http://www.worship.ca/text/int_a2.txt)

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