

# Proper 11



## Prayer of the Day

O God, you see how busy we are with many things. Turn us to listen to your teachings and lead us to choose the one thing which will not be taken from us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Genesis 18:1-10a

{1} The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mare, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. {2} He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. {3} He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. {4} Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. {5} Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on--since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." {6} And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." {7} Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. {8} Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. {9} They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." {10} Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son."

*1. The Lord appeared to Abraham:* The first half of the verse is the chapter heading. Without it the story is about three messengers; with it, these are no messengers, earthly or heavenly, but Yahweh himself. In 18:22 the men (cf. 19:1, "two angels") go toward Sodom, while Abraham remains before Yahweh.

*the oaks of Mamre:* A place in the vicinity of Hebron and Kiriath-arba on the southern borders of Palestine.

*2. three men standing near him:* "this is the oriental equivalent of knocking'.... So too in Judg. 19:15 the old man stands in the open street waiting for an invitation." [1] Yahweh appears as three people. Human vision is not capable of encompassing deity; it is not strong enough to bear the image of God, even in an earthly guise, so Abraham makes sense of what he sees as best he can.

*he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground:* "no one is in a hurry elsewhere in the patriarchal stories; here it is haste in the service of others.... hospitality in modern culture is practiced by and large within a chosen circle, whereas it is available in Gen. 18 to whomever needs it.... Abraham is completely at their service; hence his availability, haste, and concern." [2]

*he...bowed down to the ground:* "Abraham does not know who the strangers are, but he cannot and will not exclude the possibility that they are worthy of honor. One who comes as a stranger is honored because a dignity may be his without there being need of any external sign thereof." [3]

3-5: Abraham offers hospitality: they are asked to stop, wash their feet and rest, and further they are offered bread. They accept.

6-8: Sarah is asked to prepare cakes of bread. Abraham, himself, oversees the selection

of a calf, which is prepared by a servant. The food is set before them, and Abraham watches as they eat.

*he took curds and milk and the calf:* This meal pre-dates the law against serving meat and milk at the same meal (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21).

10. *I will surely return to you in due season* "The detail about the time of the birth occurs word for word in 2 Kings 4:16-17, 'this time next year....' [4]

Sarah's childlessness and the promise of a son and heir has been an issue throughout the stories of Abraham from the very beginning (Genesis 11:30). The arrival of an heir of "your very own issue" (Genesis 15:4) is now about to take place.

## Psalm 15

{1} O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? {2} Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; {3} who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; {4} in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; {5} who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

The Psalm is "torah liturgy" or "liturgy of entrance." "At the time of entrance into the sanctuary in Jerusalem, a liturgical act took place. The participants in the worship stand at the portals of the worship area and ask the question: "O Yahweh, who may sojourn in your tent, who may dwell on your holy hill.?" From the inside a priestly speaker answers them with the declaration of the conditions of entrance." [5]

2: Only the one who walks blamelessly may enter the Temple of Yahweh.

4. *the wicked...those who fear the Lord:* There are two groups of people in Israel, the wicked and the righteous. The righteous keep their word, *even to their own hurt*.

5. *do not lend money at interest:* Israelites were prohibited from charging interest on money loaned to Israelites (Exodus 22:25). Interest could be charged on money loaned to non-Israelites (Deuteronomy 23:20).

6. *bribe against the innocent:* Both giving (Exodus 23:8 and receiving (Deuteronomy 16:19) is expressly forbidden. That bribery of officials was a frequent and despised practice by the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor and powerless is clear from the number of passages that condemn it.

*Those who do such things:* Those who "walk blamelessly, do what is right, speak the truth, do not slander, do no evil, do not reproach their neighbors, who despise the wicked, and honor those who fear the Lord, who stand by their oath, do not lend at interest or take bribes.

*shall never be moved:* "...a fixed formula.... Directly pledging the stability and imperturbability mediated by trust in Yahweh." [6]

## Colossians 1:15-28

{15} He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; {16} for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him. {17} He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. {18} He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. {19} For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, {20} and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. {21} And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, {22} he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and

irreproachable before him-- {23} provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. {24} I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. {25} I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, {26} the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. {27} To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. {28} It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

"...Colossians 1:15-20 embodies an early Christian tribute, set in hymnic form, to the Church's Lord, which the writer borrows from the liturgical praxis which was familiar both to himself [Paul] and to his readers." [7]

15-16: The verses recall the creation narrative in Genesis: the image of God, all things in heaven and earth. "He" is the Lord (verse 10) Jesus. Not only are all things created *in* him, they are created *for* him. "The ruler of the cosmos is, was, and always will be none other than Jesus Christ. This outrageous claim is only possible within Paul's framework of the full and concurrent humanity and divinity of Christ Jesus. If we would only have the eyes and ears of faith, then we can experience the work and person of *this* Christ: cosmic and crucified, God and human, master of the universe and intimate friend." [8]

17-20: The Lord is before everything ("Before Abraham was, I am," John 5:58); he is the firstborn of the dead (also the firstborn of all creation, verse 15); he is the head of the body, the church (1 Corinthians 12); God's fullness dwells in him: *pleroma* "is the fullness of God (in the active sense), filling Jesus, and is thus the depiction of the presence of God in his Son and thereby in the world." [9]

21-22. *you who were once estranged and hostile...doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled...so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable*: Paul expands on this in Romans 5. If we were reconciled by Christ's death while we were weak (verse 6), still sinners (8) enemies (10), we will now be saved by his life.

23. *provided you continue...in the faith*: "Faith (*[pistis]*) determines the beginning of being a Christian (cf. 1:4); to this one must adhere unperturbed. Then the life of the community will be established upon a firm foundation.... serve[s] to impress upon the community that they must not depart from faith and hope." [10]

24-25: Paul describes his own steadfastness in the faith through suffering, completing, as he says, the sufferings of Christ.

*completing what is lacking*: "The expression...certainly cannot be taken to mean that there still might be something lacking in the vicarious sufferings of Christ which must be supplied by the apostle.... What is indicated by this phrase is neither a mystical union of suffering nor a restriction of the salvific significance of Christ's death. What does, however, provide the background for the phrase "Christ's afflictions" (which appears only here in the New Testament) is the apocalyptic conception of the afflictions of the end time, the woes of the Messiah." [11] Paul now lives in the midst of the afflictions of the end time, and enables the whole church to know fully the word of God.

*the mystery that has been hidden*: The mystery is defined in verse 27 as "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

28. *in all wisdom*: For Paul God's wisdom in contrast to human wisdom is foolishness. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31: "The word of the cross is folly...the foolishness of God is wiser

than men...Christ Jesus, whom God has made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption...."

### **Luke 10:38-42**

{38} Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. {39} She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. {40} But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." {41} But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; {42} there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

*38. a certain village:* Within the itinerary the village is closer to Galilee than Jerusalem. Martha, Mary and their brother, Lazarus, live in Bethany near Jerusalem (John 12:1-3), which is not reached in Luke's gospel until 19:29.

*Martha...Mary:* Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha live in Bethany near Jerusalem (John 12:1-3), which is not reached in Luke's gospel until 19:29.

*39-40. Mary...sat at the Lord's feet and listened... Martha was distracted by her many tasks:* In the passage before this, the story of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan (who was customarily scorned), was a better "neighbor," that is, countryman, than the priest or levite. Here listening and being busy with many things are contrasted, to the advantage of listening.

*42. there is need of only one thing:* Martha does not need to prepare more than one dish. *Mary has chosen the better part:* The simple peasant meal has become a metaphor for the one thing needful for a rich spiritual life. "Priority is given to the hearing of the word coming from God's messenger over preoccupation with all other concerns."

### **Reflection**

In the prayer of the day we ask God to "turn us to listen to your teachings and lead us to choose...Jesus Christ." The lessons explore some of the ways that might be seen among us.

The visit of the three men to Abraham is recalled in Hebrews 13:2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Respect, hospitality, even simple courtesy are rare quantities in the social exchanges of our time. The lesson would have us conduct ourselves in such a way that we do not risk insulting divine messengers who might come to us. The hospitality Abraham showed Yahweh is like the hospitality Mary and Martha showed Jesus in the Gospel.

Hans-Joachim Kraus comments concerning Psalm 15, "The worship in the sanctuary begins with a decisive question about obedience." [12] We might wonder what would happen to *our* worship if such conduct were expected of those who come to church.

Paul makes clear that our salvation is through Christ's death, and that it depends our faithful living out of our hope, even though it may seem to be foolishness. Today many things that used to be thought of as virtues, honor, commitment, faithfulness, have come to be regarded as foolishness. For Paul, and for Christians they are nevertheless qualities to be admired, pursued and cultivated.

Martha's business is set in contrast with Mary's devoted listening to the advantage of listening. However, "To read this episode as a commendation of contemplative life over against active life is to allegorize it beyond recognition and to introduce a distinction

that was born only of later preoccupations." [13] In both the first lesson and the Gospel the unexpected is invoked: an unexpected child in the first lesson, an unexpected affirmation and rejection in the Gospel. And in both God is the source of the unexpected.

### 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

300 --II--O Christ, Our  
298 --II--One There Is,  
104 --II--In the Cross

203, 396, 263, 801s/768v  
771s/801v, 439, 503

### Prayers of the People [15]

P or A: For the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, despite gender, economic status, or cultural background, we offer these petitions praying in Jesus' name and responding together, "Amen."

A: For those who are oppressed and exploited by violent governments and unjust economic systems, that they might be liberated from these chains. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For those who are slaves to greed and the pursuit of wealth, that they might instead seek the Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For those who suffer for the sake of the gospel, that they might find inner peace and a heavenly reward for their participation in Christ crucified. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For those in ill health, that they might be healed. We remember \_\_\_\_\_. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For those who are consumed by work, that they might learn to sit at the feet of the Lord in quiet contemplation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

P: We pray together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, living by his grace and trusting in his abundant mercy. Amen.

### Or [16]

#### *Presider or deacon*

Let us welcome the strangers at our door with food and prayer in the name of Jesus.

#### *Deacon or other leader*

For *N* our bishop, for this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For all peoples on earth and their leaders.

For mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

For those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For all those in danger and need: refugees in search of shelter, travelers on their journey, and for those who give them hospitality.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

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



Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

**To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

God who comes among us in the person of Jesus, hear the prayers we offer today and grace our homes with your presence in word and at table, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Notes

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[1] Claus Wassermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981, p. 276, following Franz Doltish.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 277.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 277-278.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 280.

[5] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 227.

[6] A. Baumann, "mwt...", *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984, vol. 8, pp. 157-158.

[7] Ralph P. Martin, "An Early Christian Hymn (Col. 1:15-20)," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 36(1964)199-200.

[8] Thomas R. Gildemeister, "Christology and the Focus of Faith: Readings from Paul's Letter to the Colossians in Year C," *Quarterly Review*, Spring 1998, p. 100.

[9] Marcus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1994, 212.

[10] Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, p. 66.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 69-70.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

[13] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985, pp. 892-893.

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

[15] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter\\_c.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt)

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