

Proper 14



Prayer of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve. Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merit of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Genesis 15:1-6

{1} After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." {2} But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" {3} And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." {4} But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." {5} He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." {6} And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 is the first lesson for Lent 2 in Year C.

1. *the word of the Lord came*: This is a prophetic formula which is used only here and in verse 4 in the book of Genesis. In 1 Kings 18:31 there is a similar use of the phrase that indicates that "the word of the Lord came" also to Jacob/Israel.

2. *what will you give me, for I continue childless*: Abram complains that Yahweh has not fulfilled his promise of posterity (Genesis 12:1-3). Nothing less than an heir by blood is a fulfillment of Yahweh's promise; nothing less is will satisfy Abram.

Eliezer of Damascus: It is possible though not certain that Eliezer is the servant mentioned in Genesis 24:2. He is charged with the responsibility of acquiring a wife for Isaac, the heir who would have disinherited him.

2-3: "...vs. 1-6 must belong in part to the Elohist (certainly vs. 5-6), for within the first part of the narrative there are many strange doublets and breaks that suggest an interweaving of the sources (v. 3 is parallel to v. 2, v. 5 probably to v. 4)." [1]

4-5: "First, God refutes the objection (v. 4) with the promise of a son of Abraham's own body (v. 4b). Second, God confirms the promise with a sign (v. 5)." [2]

so shall your descendants be: See Genesis 13:16 for a similar promise.

6. *he believed...reckoned it to him as righteousness*: In verses 2-3 Abram despairs of a blood-heir, yet in this verse his trust in Yahweh's, as yet unfulfilled promise, is "reckoned...as righteousness." It is not a description of a process by which Abram came to trust God against the evidence, but a formal recognition of the righteousness of Abram which presupposes his believing. The same phrase is used with the same force, concerning Phineas, in Psalm 106:31. In Deuteronomy 24:13 not abusing a poor person who has pledged his garment as surety for a loan is "reckoned as *tsedaqah* (righteousness) before Yahweh."

Psalm 33:12-22

{12} Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage. {13} The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind. {14} From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth-- {15} he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds. {16} A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. {17} The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save. {18} Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, {19} to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. {20} Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield. {21} Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. {22} Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

12. Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord: This is a "wisdom" formulation. In what follows we are told that Yahweh watches everyone on earth and observes what they do. The implication is that it is "wise" to conform one's life to Yahweh's wisdom.

18-19: Armies do not protect kings, nor does strength deliver a warrior in the absence of God's favor. Yahweh will deliver those who "fear him" (verse 18).

20-22: The singer proclaims the confidence and joy of the worshipping community in Yahweh, and prays for the gift of his steadfast love because "we trust in his holy name."

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

{1} Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. {2} Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. {3} By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.... {8} By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. {9} By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. {10} For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. {11} By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old--and Sarah herself was barren--because he considered him faithful who had promised. {12} Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore." {13} All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, {14} for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. {15} If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. {16} But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

1. faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen: This should not be taken as a definition of faith, at least not an exhaustive definition.

2-3: Faith is dependence upon, and trust in God who guides one's life and fulfills his promises. At times, indeed frequently, it means ignoring the conclusions of human experience in favor of the promises and claims of God.

[*4-7:* Abel, Enoch, and Noah are mentioned as exemplars of faith, before the author calls forth Abraham as greatest example.]

8-12: Abraham and his descendents illustrate how confidence in God's promises guides the lives of the faithful. Abraham was not absolute in his confidence that Yahweh would keep his promise of an heir (Genesis 17:17). Nevertheless, he lived as though the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise was certain.

8, 9, 11. By faith. As there were three exemplars of faith before Abraham, so Abraham's (and Sarah's) faith is demonstrated by three examples, leaving his home, settling in an unknown land, trusting Yahweh to fulfill his promise to give Sarah a son (Genesis 17:16).

13-16: They did not receive the fulfillment of God's promises, but were confident that they would be fulfilled, and God has indeed prepared a city for them.

13. *All of these died*: Abraham's descendents died without having received the promises, that is the land and the respect of the nations.

Luke 12:32-40

{32} "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. {33} Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. {34} For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. {35} "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; {36} be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. {37} Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. {38} If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. {39} "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. {40} You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

12. *little flock...give you the kingdom*: The early Christian community was tiny, and yet it is admonished not to be afraid because God will give it the greatest gift, the kingdom itself!

33-34: The location of these verses (22-34), "immediately after Luke's warnings to the rich in 12:15, 16-21 suggests that they are addressed to the rich in Luke's audience rather than peasants (or even the poor of the city). The instruction to sell possessions and give alms likewise reflects the position of the rich. Failure to give from their surplus is precisely what is criticized in the parable of 12:16-21." [3]

35-39: "The sayings fall into three sections: the first [verses 35-36] deals with the watchful servants of an absent master; the second [37-38] with a watchful master; and the third [verse 39] with the manager of an absent master. As a group they present parable-like sayings about servants and masters and the relation between them." [4]

40. *the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour*: Jesus is crystal clear that we shall not know when he is to return. We are simply to be prepared for his return at any moment. Efforts to discern the time of his coming would be viewed as an effort to avoid constant vigilance and as the consequence of a lack of faith, and a dependence on human wisdom rather than the Father's faithfulness.

Reflection

Faith is the subject of the lessons. In the first lesson Abraham's trust in Yahweh in the face of the non-fulfillment of Yahweh's promise that Abraham would have many descendents is seen by Yahweh as a righteous act. In the second lesson, the faith of Abraham and his descendents is described and praised. God was not shamed by them. The Psalm enables us to express our own confidence in God as we declare our trust in his holy name.

In the Gospel Jesus calls on his disciples to trust the Father's promise to give them the kingdom. We are to give up all ties to this world, and be prepared for action, because the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. When he does we are urged to be awake and ready to greet him.

Hymns [5]

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

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 801s --E--He Comes to (768v) | 361 --G--Do Not Despair, O |
| 443 --D--Rise, My Soul, | 476 --G--Have No Fear, |
| 479 --II--My Faith Looks | 31 --G--Wake, Awake, for |
| 689v --II--Rejoice in God's | 796s, 318, 321, 485 |

Prayers of the People [6]

P or A: We lift our prayers before God in humility. We pray together in Jesus' name and respond together, "Amen."

A: For our hope in Christ, whom we have not seen with our own eyes, but whom we know through faith. That our hope and faith remain strong even in times of adversity. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: That we may be truly thankful for God's grace, which does not exact from us impossible perfection, but rather asks for a faithful heart, believing in the gift of Christ Jesus. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For true Sabbath rest, by which all are made equal as we refrain from the labour that divides us into classes and categories, rich and poor, master and slave. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For all who suffer ill health, that you would be a comfort to them in their time of despair. We pray for _____. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A: For patience in these trying times as we await the coming of our Redeemer, that we may endure in our work for justice, and be steadfast in our preaching of the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

P: Trusting in you, O God, whom we have not seen and yet believe to be the source of life and redemption, we offer our prayers in Jesus' name, Amen.

Or [7]

Presider or deacon

Dressed and ready for the coming of the kingdom, let us pray for the bounty of God in every place.

Deacon or other leader

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

For all nations and their leaders, and for mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

For good weather and abundant crops, and for travelers and those on vacation.

For the sick and the dying, the poor and the oppressed, prisoners and their families, and victims of violence and abuse.

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

For our city and every community, and for our families, 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 of Abraham, whose people are like the stars in the sky, hear the prayers we offer this day and bring us in faith to the land you promised; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

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[1] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1956, pp. 177-178.

[2] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981, p. 221.

[3] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social=Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 359.

[4] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke (X-XXIV): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985, p.985.

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

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

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