

# Proper 15



## Pentecost 13 August 18, 2002

### Prayer of the Day

Almighty and Ever-living God, you have given great and precious promises to those who believe. Grant us the perfect faith which overcomes all doubts, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The petition of this collect is found in the Book of Common Prayer (1549) for use on St. Thomas' Day. [1]

### Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

{1} Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.... {6} And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant-- {7} these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. {8} Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

*1. do right...my deliverance:* In Hebrew the same word (*tsedek*) is used for both ideas. "In the first case righteousness means conformity to the law of God (cf. lviii.2), in the second it is, as often, equivalent to salvation." [2]

*6. the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord...and hold fast to my covenant:* Isaiah's idea of ecumenicity is conversion. The way to the kingdom of God is through the covenant with Israel, and those who are not of the chosen people must accept the yoke of the law and the covenant if they would be his servants.

*7. a house of prayer for all peoples:* This is the focus of the pericope. The "house of prayer" is the Temple (1 Kings 8:41-43). Jesus cites this verse (defectively in Matthew 21:13, and Luke 19:46, but completely in Mark 11:17) as cause for driving out the merchants and money changers from the Temple. The "peoples" who are intended by Isaiah are those identified in verse 6, that is, non-Israelites.

*8. the outcasts of Israel:* The exiles were seen as outcasts by those who remained in the land of Israel, as well as by themselves.

*others:* Another reference to the faithful foreigners. Jesus also declared that there were others that would be gathered (John 10:16).

### Psalm 67

{1} May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah {2} that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. {3} Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. {4} Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah {5} Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. {6} The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. {7} May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

*1. May God be gracious...:* A version of the Aaronic benediction (Numbers 6:24ff.).

*2. your way...your saving power:* The prayer for revelation to the nations is directed to God in the

second person . This form of address continues through verse 5.

3-4. *the peoples.... the nations*: The Psalmist expresses his prayer that "the peoples," "the nations," that is, non-Israelites, may praise God because God has judged them with equity and guided them. The Psalmist prays for what Yahweh promises through the prophet in the first lesson.

1, 4: *Selah* at the end of verse 4 introduces a refrain: "Let the peoples praise you...." At the end of verse 1 *Selah* is misplaced. It belongs at the end of verse 2, where it can introduce the refrain in verse 3.

6. *The earth has yielded its increase; God...has blessed us*: The ingathering of the harvest is the occasion for the Psalm. The "increase" of the land is evidence of God's blessing. In Haggai 1:10 the earth withholds its produce as evidence of Yahweh's anger. In Deuteronomy 32:22 the "increase" is devoured by Yahweh's anger.

## **Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

{1} I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. {2} God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.... {29} for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. {30} Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, {31} so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. {32} For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

1. *has God rejected his people?*: "Paul alludes to Ps 94:14 and frames it as a question, using the negative *me* [a negative particle in Greek] (which expects a negative answer) instead of *ou* [which would expect a positive answer]." [3]

*an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin*: See also Philippians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 11:22; Acts 21:39 for further autobiographical and biographical information about Paul.

2. *God has not rejected his people*: See Isaiah 54:9-10: "Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD...."

*the gifts...are irrevocable*: These belong to Israel and will not, cannot, be withdrawn or redirected. [2b-3: The omitted material refers to 1 Kings 19:14, a part of the first lesson for last week.]

30, 31. *you...they*: The antecedents for the pronouns are found in the omitted verses. "You" are the Gentiles; "they" are the Israelites.

32. *God has imprisoned all...*: "All, both Jews and Greeks, have as groups been unfaithful to God,. Who makes use of such infidelity to manifest to all of them his bountiful mercy, to reveal about God just what he is." [4]

## **Matthew 15:[10-20] 21-28**

[{10} Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: {11} it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." {12} Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?" {13} He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. {14} Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." {15} But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." {16} Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? {17} Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? {18} But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. {19} For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. {20} These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile." {21} Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. {22} Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." {23} But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." {24} He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." {25} But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." {26} He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's

food and throw it to the dogs." {27} She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." {28} Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

*11. what goes into the mouth...what comes out of the mouth:* In Mark 7:15 it is a question of what is inside or outside of a person. Here the question is about what makes a person unclean. The laws regarding clean and unclean food indicated that what went into a person's mouth had the power to make that person unclean. Jesus declares that to be incorrect. It is what comes out of a person that defines their degree of purity. Later, in the explanation in verses 16-20, the contrast is between eating with unwashed hands and the evil intentions and actions which come from the heart, that is the mind.

*21. that place:* The land of Gennesaret (Matthew 14:34), around the Sea of Galilee.

*22. a Canaanite woman:* In the parallel in Mark 7:24-30 the woman is "a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth."

*22-28:* The healing of the daughter of a Canaanite woman continues the question of including non-Israelites in the kingdom. At first Jesus resists her request, expressing what must have been a general feeling, "the gifts of God to the people of God." But she persists, and at last Jesus praises her for her great faith and heals her daughter.

We must not forget that in the economy of the kingdom, we (at least most of us) are "the peoples," "the nations," Gentiles, Canaanites. Israel, as a people, was chosen, and that choice, together with its blessings and benefits, has not been changed. The chosen people are still the chosen people. God has made a place for us beside them, to be received and occupied by faith. We must not forget that we are wild olives grafted into a domestic olive tree. Others belong there by right, we have access only by grace!

*24. I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:* At this point Jesus describes his mission as limited to the people of Israel. That will change at the end of the Gospel (28:18-20).

*26. It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs:* Many people will quite rightly be offended by such racial chauvinism. In the first century the relationships between Israelites, the chosen people, and people of other ethnic backgrounds were not very positive. Some have sought to soften the impact of the epithet "dogs" by suggesting that the Greek word *kunariaiois* (*kunariois*) refers to "little dogs which could be tolerated in the house." [5] However, others properly see that this does nothing to alleviate the offensiveness of the metaphor. "No more attractive is the notion that by this violent rebuff is 'trying her faith' (McNeile and many others, including Luther!)." [6]

*27:* The woman's acceptance of Jesus' insult only makes it harsher. Can we really imagine that Jesus would require a suppliant to accept such humiliation in a desperate attempt to save her daughter?

Jesus refusal to heal the Canaanite woman's daughter illustrates the Pharisee's understanding of the requirements of purity, which Jesus repudiates by recognizing the woman's faith and acceding to her request.

*28. Woman, great is your faith!:* She had nothing, not even the right to ask, except faith. A faith so great that it even changed Jesus' mind.

Two things happen in the story. First, Jesus sets limits on what he is to do. "Even Jesus does not expect to help everybody." [7] But second, "Even Jesus, who presumably has divine authorization for his limits ('I was sent...'), allows those limits to be stretched by another's necessity. In other words, the rule here is that there is no rule, only a creative tension between our finite capacities and the world's infinite need." [8] If we want to know who Jesus is, we should ask this woman with the sick daughter.

## Reflection

Yahweh will gather the exiles of Israel and non-Israelites who join themselves to the Lord.

Though in the past all who came to the God of Israel were required to accept the law and the covenant, God's concern for those outside that covenant led him to a new and radical solution. The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable, but God will show mercy to the Gentiles.

The Psalmist sings God's blessing on the people of Israel and calls on all nations and peoples to praise God. The Psalm is a response to Yahweh's declaration in the first lesson that they will be accepted at the altar of Yahweh.

In the second lesson Paul struggles with the rejection of Jesus by his co-religionists. Gentiles who have believed in him have been grafted onto the holy root (11:16b-17). But that does not mean the rejection of the people God "foreknew." God's choice cannot be withdrawn. Those who have been disobedient will receive mercy, and "be grafted back into their own olive tree" (11:24).

The identification of the woman as a Canaanite, a member of the aboriginal population of the land of Israel invites a comparison with the Dakota in South Dakota. Both survived for many generations in spite of an almost total disenfranchisement. Land, political power, religious authority, social prestige all passed to newcomers who believed that they had been given the land by their God. Both have often been reduced to enduring the slurs of the powerful and begging for the crumbs that fall from the tables of the dominant population. Ironically, the Judaism has also had to endure such disenfranchisement by late-comers, Christians and Moslems.

Jesus' healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter in response to her faith is an paradigm by which our (Gentile's) place in the kingdom is assured. We shall be received because we have put our trust in God. One line of approach might be to develop the nature of revelation in silence as in 1 Kings 19:12, the first lesson for last Sunday in connection with Jesus' first response to the woman in which "he did not answer her at all."

## Hymns [9]

*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

521 E--Let Us with

303 D--When in the

448 II--Amazing Grace, How

310 G--To You, Omniscient

360 G--O Christ, the

393 G--Rise, Shine, You

823s/738v, 264, 380, 317

## Prayers of the People [10]

P or A: In our fears and in our joys we remember the strength of Christ and cry out to God for all the needs of the world, saying, "To all who call, God is generous.," and responding, "Lord, save us."

A: Let your church be a place of refuge for those who have been tossed about in storms of life. Grant that all people may know Christ's saving presence in the Word proclaimed and the sacraments celebrated. Bless your servants who come proclaiming good news. To all who call, God is generous. Lord, save us.

A: The winds of war and storms of violence brutalize whole peoples. We pray for peace among the nations and wisdom for leaders. Make us your tools for reconciliation, show us what we can do. To all who call, God is generous. Lord, save us.

A: Families are under pressure and need to remind one another of their affection and need for one another. Help all the members of God's family; young, old, single, married, divorced, widowed, learn to support one another and give the gift of family new dimensions in the world. To all who call, God is generous. Lord, save us.

A: Illness and disease trouble all peoples. We remember those who have asked for our prayers \_\_\_\_\_. For your healing for bodies, minds and heart we pray. To all who call, God is generous. Lord, save us.

A: Jesus needed time to go aside, to be alone with the Father and to pray. As we take time for rest and refreshment, do not let us neglect our spiritual needs. Keep us from being too busy to take time for spiritual renewal. To all who call, God is generous. Lord, save us.

P: We give thanks for those saints who called on you to save them from imprisonment, pain and uncertainty. Let their examples comfort and encourage us, In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

**Or** [11]

*Presider or deacon*

Like the Canaanite woman, let us shout to the Lord for mercy and offer prayers for all in desperate need.

*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 students and teachers, and all those returning to their studies.

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

For dogs, and all domestic and wild animals.

For the lame, maimed, blind, mute, and all those with handicaps.

For the sick and the suffering, prisoners and their families, foreigners and outcasts, and all in danger and need.

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

For our city and those who live in it, and for our families, companions, and all 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*

God of infinite love, who heals those who call on you, have mercy on us miserable sinners and grant our prayers for all the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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## Notes

[1] Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947, pp. 612 f.

[2] J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters XL-LXVI*. Cambridge University Press, 1954, p. 164.

[3] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1993, p. 603.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 628.

[5] *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 3 p.1104.

[6] Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, p.342.

[7] Garret Keizer, "Feed my dogs," *Christian Century*. July 28-August 4, 1999, p. 741.

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0102.txt>

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

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