



Pentecost 14 August 25, 2002

Prayer of the Day

God of all creation, you reach out to call people of all nations to your kingdom. As you gather disciples from near and far, count us also among those who boldly confess your Son Jesus Christ as Lord

Isaiah 51:1-6

{1} Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. {2} Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. {3} For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. {4} Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. {5} I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. {6} Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

1-4: Isaiah calls on the people of Israel to "put away the fears and misgivings which hinder their full acceptance of the promise of salvation." [1] They are descendants of Abraham and Sarah and Yahweh will bring comfort and joy to those who have been hewn from "the rock...dug from the quarry." Verse 1 is in parallel with verse two where the rock and the quarry are identified as "Abraham your father and...Sarah who bore you."

1, 4, [7]. *Listen to me*: The verb is different in verse 4. Marks the division into strophes. "The first draws a lesson of encouragement from the example of the solitary patriarch Abraham.... The next strophe directs the hope of the loyal Israelites to the glorious future that belongs to those who wait for Jehovah's salvation.... The last strophe... reminds the exiles that the reproach they fear is that of frail and short-lived mortals, while the salvation they hope for endures for ever (vv. 7-8)." [2]

3. *her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord*: In Genesis 13:10 the plain of the Jordan is compared to "the garden of the Lord;" in Ezekiel 28:13 the king of Tyre is said to have been "in Eden, the garden of God;" and in Ezekiel 31:8f. Assyria is compared with "the cedars in the garden of God." The desolation of Zion, the Temple mount, will be restored to the primeval conditions of the garden of Eden.

4. *a teaching will go out from me*: Torah., "revelation" [3]

my justice for a light to the peoples: Yahweh will not only govern his own chosen people, but he will bring light to non-Israelites as well. They, too, will know his deliverance and salvation. On the one hand, Gentiles are also beneficiaries of God's inclusive grace. And for their blessing he modified the rules by which they were brought into his kingdom. On the other hand, now that they have been accepted into his

kingdom, "the peoples" are those who are still outside, and to whom God offers his light and salvation on terms they can understand and accept.

5. *my arm*: "Power" or "strength" See Isaiah 33:2.

6. *the heavens will vanish...the earth will wear out...my salvation...will never be ended*: Even the heavens and the earth which seem so eternal will fail, but Yahweh's salvation for all is eternal.

Psalm 138

{1} I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; {2} I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. {3} On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. {4} All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. {5} They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. {6} For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away. {7} Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. {8} The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

1. *I give you thanks*: "An individual member of the OT community comes into the presence of Yahweh with a song of thanksgiving. Such a song of thanksgiving is always at the same time a witness to Yahweh's wondrous help and a confession of his goodness that is unchanging in Israel." [4]

before the gods I sing your praise: In the ancient cultic tradition of Jerusalem in which all divine entities were subordinated to Yahweh. Praising Yahweh before "the gods" shows their impotence before Yahweh's sovereignty.

2. *I give thanks to your name*: Here and in verse 1, "I give thanks" identifies the Psalm as a song of thanksgiving. The parallelism between verse 1 and verse 2 equates "your name" with "Yahweh." "The...[shem, "name"] announces the secret of the presence of Yahweh. Where the...[shem] is, there Yahweh himself is with his benevolent attention."

3. *you increased my strength of soul*: The occasion for the song is verse 7, and this phrase indicates the effect of Yahweh's action in response to the singer's troubles

4. *All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord*: As representatives of earthly power and authority the kings, including David and his descendants (Psalm 89:27), acknowledge Yahweh's might and glory.

6. *he regards the lowly*: For his part Yahweh regards the lowly, both the lowly individual, and the lowly nation, Israel.

the haughty he perceives from far away: The image is of looking at a high mountain from a great distance, and seeing a low hill.

7-8: The psalmist acknowledges Yahweh's intervention and help, and prays for Yahweh's continued protection.

"The psalm is to be dated in a relatively late, probably postexilic, time. The message of Deutero-Isaiah must be presupposed." [5]

Romans 12:1-8

{1} I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. {2} Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. {3} For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. {4} For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, {5} so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. {6} We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to

faith; {7} ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; {8} the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

These verses open the "hortatory section" of Paul's letter. He speaks directly to the Christians in Rome, whom he does not know, and encourages them to conduct their lives in conformity with their faith in Christ and the justification they have received from God. Verses 3-8 emphasizes using God's gifts for the benefit of the community as a whole.

1. *a living sacrifice*: The Christian life is a life which is a loss to oneself and gain to the Christian community. Faith and justification are not treasures to be hoarded, but gifts to be shared. This is the Christian's "spiritual worship."

2. *conformed...transformed*: We live in a wondrous world, one which offers many pleasures and opportunities. But it is a world to which we are not to become attached. We are to allow the Spirit to transform us, to change us so we are renewed and may know and live according to the will of God.

3. I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned: Before we are called into God's kingdom we are tempted to all kinds of ungodly behavior. Now the temptations are more subtle and more dangerous. Paul warns us not to become smug and because God has blessed us with his gifts. He has given his gifts, not for our benefit, but for his purposes.

4-8. *one body...many members...gifts that differ*: Paul uses the body as a metaphor for the church. It is an organic unity in which the components have their proper functions. Each component co-inheres [6] in all the others. "As in 1 Cor 12:12-31, the phrase 'one body' probably does not suggest anything more than a moral union of the members who work together for the common good of the whole, as in the body politic.... Nor does he mention the 'one body' in any connection with the church. Christians are 'one body'[because they are 'in Christ' (8:1; cf. Gal 3:26)." [7]

Matthew 16:13-20

{13} Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" {14} And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." {15} He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" {16} Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." {17} And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. {18} And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. {19} I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." {20} Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Parallels: Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-22. Verses 17-19 are unique to Matthew.

13. *Caesarea Philippi*: Following the death of Herod in 4 b.c., his son Philip rebuilt the city of Paneas on the side of Mt. Hermon and renamed it Caesarea in honor of the emperor, Tiberius. It was called Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima on the coast. It was a mostly Gentile city.

people: The general population as distinguished from the disciples whose opinion is requested in verse 15.

the Son of Man: "Son of Man" replaces "I" in the parallels in Mark 8:27 and Luke 9:18. The expression appears only in sayings of Jesus and describe what Jesus, whom Matthew identifies as the Son of Man, does. He does not use it to say who Jesus is. Here it is used to introduce the identification current in Matthew's community, that is, Jesus, the Son of Man, is "the Son of the living God."

14: *John the Baptist*: John the Baptist was thought by some, including Herod (Matthew

14:2), to have been raised from the dead and now manifested himself in the person of Jesus.

Elijah: Jesus identified John as Elijah (Matthew 11:13-14; 17:12-13). Herod said that Jesus was John come back to life.

Jeremiah: Added to Mark by Matthew.

15. *But who do you say that I am?*: "You" is plural. It is addressed to all the disciples. They have already confessed that Jesus is the Son of Man (Matthew 14:33).

16. *You are the Messiah*: The Son of Man is a prophetic figure, not a (royal) Messianic figure. Matthew brings the two figures together, healing the breach between the royal theology of David and Zion and the prophetic theology of the Sinai covenant and the law.

the Son of the living God: "It means the real God who acts in history in contrast to the dead gentile idols." [8]

17. *Blessed are you*: A beatitude. Peter is blessed by a revelation from Jesus' Father in heaven as to Jesus' identity. See Matthew 13:16-17 for a beatitude addressed to all the disciples.

Simon son of Jonah: A parallel to his confession of Jesus as son of God. Jonah = John (John 1:42; 21:15-17) (Johanan.)

flesh and blood: The phrase is "often used by the rabbis where human transitoriness is contrasted with divine omnipotence. [9] It is God, not human beings, who has revealed to Peter who Jesus is.

I tell you, you are Peter: Peter's given name was Symeon (Acts 15:14). He was also known as Simon (Luke 4:38; Acts 10:5 *et al.*), either a Hellenized version of the name or a reflection of what some believe to have been a custom of giving a male child a similar sounding Greek or Roman name. Jesus gave him a new name, *cephas* in Aramaic, *petros* in Greek (John 1:42) Matthew 14:28-29, which conveys the idea of rock-like stability and strength. [10] The name Peter is now exploited.

on this rock: "Three ways of interpreting the rock have competed since late antiquity. The First and the third related the text personally to Peter, the second did not. 1. *The "Eastern" interpretation: Peter's confession (or faith) is the church's fundamental rock....* 2. *The Augustinian interpretation: Christ is the fundamental rock of the church.....* 3. *The Roman interpretation: Peter and after him the pope is the church's foundation rock.*" [11] The rock from which the righteous are hewn is Abraham (Isaiah 51:1-2). Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders which becomes the cornerstone (Matthew 21:42). According to *Mishnah Yoma 5:2* there was a stone called "Shuteye" in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. Isaiah speaks of the foundation stone Yahweh has laid in Zion (Isaiah 28:16). The image is of such stones which are all metaphors for the strong, reliable teachings and actions of God.

church: This word translated "church" (*ecclesia*) occurs only here and in Matthew 18:17 (in a different sense) in the Gospels. [12]

the gates of Hades will not prevail: "Hades" is the Greek word used to indicate the Hebrew "Sheol." In Greek mythology the gates of Hades refer to the abode of the dead. "...like the Hebrew *Sheol*, it is neither a heaven nor a hell, but a dark and joyless realm which receives all the dead—not to an abundant life, but to a shadowy existence without strength or understanding. The phrase here means simply 'death'. The church which Jesus will found will be immune from death." [13]

19. *I will give you*: "You" is singular. In Matthew 18:18 the pronoun is plural; the gift given to Peter is assigned to the church (the local congregation).

keys of the kingdom of heaven: Isaiah 22:22 speaks of the transfer of the office of steward from Sheba to Eli Kim son of Hellish, "I will place on his shoulder the key of

the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open" The keys are "symbols of responsibilities to be exercised within the house of God." [14] Here Jesus gives to Peter a similar responsibility for the kingdom of heaven.

whatever you bind...will be bound: "'Bind' and 'loose' are technical terms of the rabbinical vocabulary, denoting the authoritative declaration that an action or course of conduct is permitted or forbidden by the Law of Moses. It has nothing to do with the power of absolution, though it may carry with it the authority to expel an offender from the synagogue or to readmit him. In Matthew 18:18 (Proper 18) this authority is given to the church rather than to an individual. In John 20:23, the authority to absolve from sin is specifically mentioned.

20. he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah: The disciples had recognized him as the Messiah (14:33) and Peter said it again, but the people think of him as a prophetic figure with eschatological overtones. "The knowledge that Jesus is the Christ belongs to the disciples alone. They now constitute the church which is also distinguished from the people." [15] In the next verse Jesus begins his explicit teaching of the disciples about the necessity of his passion.

Reflection

Yahweh promised justice, deliverance and salvation. While the heavens will disappear like smoke, the earth, wear out and those who live on it, die, God's promises will last forever. The Psalm sings the praises of the Lord whose steadfast love and faithfulness have preserved the singer and delivered him/her from his/her enemies, and who also gives light and salvation to the nations. As we reflect on the blessings with which the Lord has gifted us, we praise him for his goodness and his glory.

Now, Jesus is recognized as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He gives to Peter the authority to determine what courses of action are permitted or not in the church. God's gifts are given, not only to the people of Israel, but also to "the peoples," Gentiles. What we are to believe, what we are to do, are not ours to determine. Rather God has provided the instruction we need to know how to do his will, and by his Spirit he has enabled us to do what he has given us to do. We are to praise God not only with our words, our songs, but also by our actions. Paul calls upon us to offer ourselves as sacrifices to God, to reject the world and seek the will of God.

Though God's will is one, our gifts are many, and our ways of serving are not all the same. We are not expected to all do the same thing, only to do what we can for the community with the gifts we have been given.

Hymns [16]

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

284 E—Creator Spirit,
Heavenly
365 D—Built on a
381 II—Hark, the Voice
126 II—Where Charity and

820s II—Many Are the
756 II—Lord, You Give
177 G—By All Your
225, 374, 410, 770s/754v

Prayers of the People [17]

P or A: Let us pray to God, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit for our needs and the needs of all people, saying, "Hear us, O God," and responding, "We trust in your

compassion."

A: We pray for the faith of Peter which provides so firm a foundation for your holy church.

Teach us all to freely confess your name and your messiahship with our words and our actions.

Give peace to those whose faith is troubled. Hear us, O God. We trust in your compassion.

A: We pray for rulers who place heavy burdens on their citizens and do not respect God or humankind. Soften their hearts and change them into servants of their people and justice. For those who suffer for their ethnic origins or religion we ask for relief and new pride in themselves. Hear us, O God. We trust in your compassion.

A: As there is one body with many members, we ask for the gift of unity for your church. Guide us in the quest for your church's reunion and we pray for all faithful Christians. Let our relationship with the Anglican Church of Canada be mutually helpful and supportive. May it lead to new forms of unity with others as well. Hear us, O God. We trust in your compassion.

A: For children throughout the world, that they may be welcomed into homes and families, looked after and nurtured well, and that any child in danger may be found by a protector the way the infant Moses was found and protected by Pharaoh's daughter. Hear us, O God. We trust in your compassion.

A: For any who suffer in body or spirit, remembering especially _____. Hear us, O God. We trust in your compassion.

P: Help us present ourselves as living offerings, to be alert and ready to receive every answer to our prayers, and become answers to the prayers of others, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or [18]

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God who builds the church of Christ on the rock of faith and gives it the keys of the kingdom.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, for the people of God in every place, and for all who seek the Lord.

For the light of justice among all peoples.

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

For abundant fruits of the earth, and for safety from violent storms.

For the sick and the suffering, travelers and those on vacation, prisoners, captives, and their families, and all those in danger and need.

For our city and those who live in it, and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

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

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 all riches and wisdom and knowledge, from whom and through whom and to whom are all things, receive the gift of prayer we offer this day and grant all peoples the gift of your mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters XL-LXVI*. Cambridge: University Press, 1954, p.117.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[4] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p.506.

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] This word is used by Charles Williams to express the organic relationship that exists between individual Christians and between Christians and Christ. "...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

[7] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1993, p. 646.

[8] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, p. 361.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 362, with reference to Eduard Schweizer, "*sarx ktl.*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971, Vol 7, p. 116.

[10] For a full discussion see, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic *Kepha* ' and Peter's name in the New Testament," *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament presented to Matthew Black* (ed. by Ernest Best and R. McL. Wilson), Cambridge University Press, 1979.

[11] Luz, *Ibid.*, pp.370-375. Luz concludes, "...in each case the historically contingent experiences are part of the truth of interpretations of our text. Given this recognition, *I am more than skeptical about the absolute claim that arises when certain historical experiences become the obligatory "ius Divinum."* One can only wish that the wealth and the variety of faith experiences occasioned by our text might become known again in our churches (p. 376)."

[12] The phrase "your brother" in Greek is translated "church" in the NRSV of Matthew 18:15, 21.

[13] Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981, p. 355.

[14] *Loc. cit.*

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

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

[17] http://www.worship.ca/text/int_a2.txt

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