

# Proper 22

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## Pentecost 20 October 5, 2002

### Prayer of the Day

Our Lord Jesus, you have endured the doubts and foolish questions of ever generation. Forgive us for trying to be judge over you, and grant us the confident faith to acknowledge you as Lord.

### Isaiah 5:1-7

{1} Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. {2} He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. {3} And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. {4} What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? {5} And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. {6} I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. {7} For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

1. *my beloved*: Blenkinsopp points out relationships between the word "beloved," *yedid*, and Solomon's personal name, Jedidiah (2 Samuel 12:25).

1b-2: The song of the vineyard, which ends with the complaint, "he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes." A vineyard is frequently a metaphor for Yahweh's people in the prophets (Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Jeremiah 2:21; 5:10; 12:10-11; Hosea 9:10; 10:1; Ezekiel 15:1-5; 17:1-12).

3. *inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah*: According to verse 7 "the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting," so the people of Judah are called on to judge themselves, as David judged himself in response to Nathan's parable (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

4. *wild grapes*: The Hebrew suggests diseased fruit rather than bitter grapes. [1]

5-6. "The loss of its hedge and fence, leaving it open to animal and human predators, points in fact unmistakably to Assyrian invasion, which is a basic concern in chs. 6-12. More specifically, the thorns and weeds..., expressive of the subsequent condition of the 'vineyard,' recur as a motif throughout the section 7:23-25; 9:17 [18]; 10:17), as also in latter allusions to the Son (27:2-5; 32:12-13)." [2]

7. *he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry*: Assonance. "he expected *mishpat*, but saw *mispah*; *tsedaqa*, but heard *tse'afa*!"

Isaiah 27:2-5: "...is clearly meant to be read in relation to the song of the vineyard in 5:1-7.... as a radical revision or eschatological abrogation of 5:1-7.... 27:6 should be read as a further comment on 27:2-5, using the same agricultural images of taking root, budding, blossoming, and extending the care of Yahweh for his plot into the distant future." [3]

### Psalm 80:7-15

{7} Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. {8} You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. {9} You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled

the land. {10} The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; {11} it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River. {12} Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? {13} The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. {14} Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, {15} the stock that your right hand planted.

These verses of Psalm 80 are a metaphorical description of the history of Israel, including the exile. As a prayer of the house of Israel that God would restore the vine he planted the Psalm responds to the first lesson.

7. *Restore us*: "Surely we may assume that the catastrophe of 722 b.c.e. is here presupposed.... the community prays for Yahweh's intervention and the restoration of Israel (v. 7)." [4]

*let your face shine, that we may be saved*: The petition is repeated three times in the Psalm, verses 3, 7, and 19. "Letting the face shine is a sign of gracious attention and blessing (cf. Num. 6:25 [the Aaronic benediction])." [5]

8-11: Yahweh's establishment and nurture of Israel is described in an allegory of a grapevine, "brought...out of Egypt," and planted. It grew deep and mighty, extending even to the Euphrates.

12-13: Now, however, the relationship between Yahweh and his people has changed; he has withdrawn his protection and the land is abandoned to its enemies.

14-15: "The treat middle section closes with the plea addressed to Yahweh that he would return (from hiddenness) and mercifully look down from heaven." [6]

### **Philippians 3:4b-14**

{4b} If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: {5} circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; {6} as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. {7} Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. {8} More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ {9} and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. {10} I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, {11} if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. {12} Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. {13} Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, {14} I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

5. *circumcised on the eighth day*: Leviticus 12:3. Neither Paul nor Luke refer to his circumcision elsewhere.

*a member of the people of Israel...a Hebrew born of Hebrews*: Paul refers to himself as an Israelite, a son of Abraham, or a Hebrew, never a Jew. Luke calls him a Jew in Acts 21: 39 and 22:3. In Acts 6:1 Hebrews and Hellenists are co-religionists with different languages and customs.  
*of the tribe of Benjamin*: See also Romans 11:1. Paul's namesake, Saul, was also a Benjamite (1 Samuel 9:21, 10:21; Acts 13:21).

*a Pharisee*: Paul identifies his sectarian identity as Pharisee in Acts 23:6 and 26:5.

6. *a persecutor of the church*: Galatians 1:13.

*as to righteousness under the law, blameless*: The Greek word here, *amemptos*, applies to sins of omission. [7] In Galatians 1:14 Paul wrote: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors." See 2 Corinthians 11:21-33 for a counter-example of Paul's bragging.

7-8. *whatever gains I had...I...regard as loss because of... the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*: However significant the qualities Paul has recounted, they are insignificant, indeed less than significant—"loss"—because of the "surpassing value" of knowing Christ. Paul's experience may be compared to the merchant who sold everything to acquire a single pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46).

9. *righteousness...from the law...from God*: As Paul's autobiographical attributes are viewed as a loss in comparison to knowing Christ, so Paul views his own righteousness as trivial in comparison with God's declared righteousness based on faith ("the conviction of things not seen," Hebrews 11:1).

10. *to know Christ...power of his resurrection*: Paul had not known Christ in life. His aspiration was to know the power of Christ's resurrection.

12 *this...it*: "Life eternal—the resurrection from the dead—is now viewed as the prize which will be awarded to the runner." [8] The imagery of the race continues through verse 14.

*goal*: "The verb *teteleiomai*...belongs to the terminology of the mysteries.... the highest grade was called *teleios*—perfect." [9] It is not a question of moral perfection or sinlessness, but rather instruction and initiation. Perhaps a better translation would be "adept." In some ways the goal of the adept is like that of the Pharisee, to omit nothing in the faithful practice of one's religion.

13. *what lies behind*: This refers to verses 4-7.

*what lies ahead*: A righteousness that "comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith" (verse 9).

### **Matthew 21:33-46**

{33} "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. {34} When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. {35} But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. {36} Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. {37} Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' {38} But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'" {39} So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. {40} Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" {41} They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." {42} Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? {43} Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. {44} The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." {45} When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. {46} They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

After entering Jerusalem, cleansing the Temple and cursing the fig tree (21:1-22), Jesus was challenged by the chief priests and elders to identify the source of his authority. Jesus, in turn, challenged them to declare themselves with respect to John. They declined and Jesus refused. Jesus then told several parables (A man had two sons, 21:33-46; A king gave a marriage feast, 22:1-14). Each parable indicates misfeasance or malfeasance by the authorities, and that they will be overthrown and replaced.

33-41: A Man Planted A Vineyard [10]

The fence (hedge), watchtower and wine press (vat) in our parable derive from Isaiah 5:1-7. However, in the parable, the tenants rather than the vineyard itself incur anger. The vineyard is preserved for other tenants.

34. *to collect his produce*: In the Song of Solomon 8:11-12 the rental on Solomon's vineyard at Baal-hamon is 1000 pieces of silver; the tenants (keepers) get 200.

35-37: The triple sending and the three acts against the slaves heightens the suspense and aggravates the offense of the tenants.

38. *come, let us kill him*: A similar phrase is used by Joseph's brothers (Genesis 37:20). "This is a form of inter textually, echoing a well-known story.... By alluding to the patriarchal story the parable questions whether the kingdom will surely go to the promised heirs." [11] Another text that may be in view is Ahab's acquisition of Naboth's vineyard by murder (1 Kings 21:1-19). In both stories "inheritance" is used of the disputed property.

*Get his inheritance:* The tenant's action is reflected in contemporary revolutionary thinking: expropriate the property of oppressive landlords and restore the land to the peasants. There is no effort to seek a legal basis for such actions. Yahweh's promise of the land and the frustration of that promise by the wealthy is sufficient. The tenants, however, fail to take account of the landowner's power to avenge.

Originally the parable "may well have been a warning to landowners expropriating and exporting the produce of the land." [12] In its present use it is an insult offered in response to the challenge issued by the chief priests and the elders to Jesus. The parable declares an end to their authority, and the replacement of Israel by others (Gentiles?).

42: The quotation is from Psalm 118:22-23 in the LXX. In the Psalm it is a metaphor for "the rescue of a person threatened by death.... He who was cast into the realm of death was like a stone, which the builder threw away as unfit. Yet this stone has achieved the honor of becoming the 'cornerstone'.... Verse 22 is very likely a proverb ([*marshal*]) that emphatically bears witness to the wondrous change wrought by Yahweh (v. 23)." [13]

43. *The kingdom will be taken away...and given:* The parable is frequently interpreted as authorizing a repudiation of Israel in favor of Gentile Christians. However, Matthew's audience are Christians, who seek to use the vineyard for their own purposes.

[45-46] These verses provide Matthew's interpretation of Jesus' meaning of the parable. "The chief priests and the Pharisees...perceived that he was speaking about them." As David judged himself in response to Nathan's parable (2 Samuel 12), so the shepherds of Israel have pronounced judgment on themselves. The advice, "judge not that you be not judged" comes to mind. The verses were possibly omitted from the lection to avoid a perceived anti-Semitic reference, but to omit the verses does not provide an opportunity to specifically reject anti-Semitism. The parable should not be an excuse for disparagement of the Jews, but rather for evaluation of our relationship to Jesus' authority.

## Reflection

In the first three lessons the criterion for a righteous life has changed. In Ezekiel it was a fruitful yield of justice and righteousness. In the Psalm it seems to be grounded in Yahweh's action in bringing the vine out of Egypt and planting and nurturing it. Now, in the second lesson identification with the vine (the people of Israel) and blamelessness under the law are not of significance. Only knowing and believing in the Lord Jesus leads to the prize of the heavenly call of God, the resurrection from the dead.

## 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

475 E--Come, Gracious Spirit,

421 D--Lord Christ, When

837s P--The Stars Declare

757v P--Creating God

726v P--Oh, Sing to God

482 II--When I Survey

344 II--We Sing the

367 G--Christ is Made

369, 822s, 293/4, 335

## Prayers of the People [15]

P or A: We offer our prayers with thanks and praise saying, "God, you are gracious," and responding, "Let us live thankful lives."

A: We have gathered around the proclamation of your Word. Your holy table nourishes our spirits. May your Word and sacraments motivate deeds of service and love out of gratitude for your salvation. God, you are gracious. Let us live thankful lives.

A: You have placed us in a good land with many resources and majestic beauty. Make us grateful

for the task of stewardship of creation. Help us to preserve and develop rather than waste and destroy the riches you have provided. God, you are gracious. Let us live thankful lives.

A: You have placed us in relationships to one another, parent, child, spouse, family member, companion, friend, brother and sister in Christ. These are also precious resources in our life. Help us cherish the people who share our life, care for them and never cause them pain. God, you are gracious. Let us live thankful lives.

A: We offer our worship and our daily work to you. Make it significant for us and for others. May it be a form of praise to you and honor your holy name. God, you are gracious. Let us live thankful lives.

A: We know that we often take healing in our own life and the lives of others for granted. Make us mindful of the miracle of the healing process in our bodies, minds and spirits. We pray for those in need of healing: \_\_\_\_\_. When their healing comes, let us praise you. God, you are gracious. Let us live thankful lives.

P: We remember all whose thankful lives have touched ours. May this time of national thanksgiving become time when new hope and plans emerge for distribution of our resources so that all may join in this celebration. All this we ask of you, in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Or [16]**

*Presider or deacon*

Let us offer prayers to God for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts and for all in every danger and need.

*Deacon or other leader*

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

For all peoples and their leaders, for candidates for public office, and for justice and righteousness in the world.

For all who work, and for tenants and landlords.

For good weather, and for who harvest and offer the fruits of the earth.

For all domestic and wild animals.

For the sick and the suffering, travelers and refugees, prisoners and their families, and the dying and dead.

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

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

*Presider*

O Lord our God, who sent your Son to save the whole world, hear the prayers we offer this day and confirm us to the body of your glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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## **Notes**

[1] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 2000, p. 206.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 374-375.

[4] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 142.

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[7] J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953, p. 148.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[10] For the title see Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then The Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, p. 237.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 252f.

[12] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 133.

[13] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, pp. 399-400.

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

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

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