

Proper 23



Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, source of every blessing, your generous goodness comes to us anew every day. By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness, give thanks for your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

{1} Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. {2} Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. {3} She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.".... {7} When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." {8} But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." {9} So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. {10} Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." {11} But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! {12} Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. {13} But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" {14} So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. {15} Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel...."

See also the notes for Epiphany 6 in Year B, the Year of Mark.

1. *the king of Aram*: See the note on verse 7 below.

suffered from leprosy: This is not Hansen's disease, leprosy as we know it, but a variety of skin rashes, lesions, infections, or inflammations, both contagious and non-contagious in people, or fungal growths in fabrics and houses. See Leviticus 13:1-46; 14:1-32 for the diagnosis of leprosy in a person, and provisions for purification of the person who is cured. Israelite law would have barred Naaman from public activity, but apparently the laws of Aram did not.

7. *the king of Israel*: The stories about Elisha are not in chronological order, so the king of Israel could be Ahab, Ahaziah or Jehoram. That "the Lord had given victory to Aram" suggests a connection with 1 Kings 22:29-40, where Ahab is killed in battle with the Arameans, and Azariah, his son, succeeded him. If this is the proper connection, the time is about 850 b.c. and the king of Aram is Ben Hadad III (see 2 Kings 6:24). [1]

10. *"Go, wash in the Jordan seven times...."*: Elisha's prescription is not contained in the material in Leviticus.

15: Verse 15 is omitted in Epiphany 2B. Here it is included to make clear that Naaman recognizes the exclusive reality of the God of Israel.

[15d. *please accept a present from your servant*: Elijah refuses the gift. Later his servant, Gehazi, accepted the gift for himself, and was punished with leprosy (2 Kings 15:19b-27).

Psalm 111

{1} Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation. {2} Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. {3} Full of honor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. {4} He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds; the LORD is gracious and merciful. {5} He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant. {6} He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. {7} The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. {8} They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. {9} He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name. {10} The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

Psalm 111 is an acrostic Psalm. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is represented by a half-verse in verses 1-8, and by one-third verse in verses 9-10. In spite of the restraints imposed by the external form the song is clearly a prayer of thanksgiving of some artistic merit. Paul Gerhardt paraphrased it in his hymn, "Ich will mit Dank kommen."

2-6: The works of Yahweh are seen especially in the covenant and conquest themes.

6-9: Yahweh's works and precepts are faithful and trustworthy expressions of his covenant relationship with his people. His people show their wisdom in performing them with faithfulness.

10. *The fear of the Lord...*: A wisdom saying; see Proverbs 1:29 and *passim*. "Fear of the Lord" contains elements of an intimate relationship, of obedience and submission.

2 Timothy 2:8-15

{8} Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David--that is my gospel, {9} for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. {10} Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. {11} The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; {12} if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; {13} if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself. {14} Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. {15} Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

8. *raised from the dead, a descendant of David*: The combination of resurrection and Davidic descent occurs only here and in Romans 1:1-4.

9. *I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal*: "2 Timothy is a captivity letter, most probably sent from Rome (2 Tim 1:16-17). By itself, the letter can easily be fitted into the account of Acts 28:30-31, which pictures Paul spending two years in 'Rome as a prisoner, under a form of house arrest, but able freely to engage in preaching (Acts 28:30-31)." [2]

11-13. *The saying is sure*: This is used also in 1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; and Titus 3:8 as a formula introducing an important element of the Christian tradition.

If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself: "The statement falls into the pattern that has been identified as 'Sentences of Holy Law,' which posit an equal reaction from God to an action by humans. Examples in Paul include 1 Cor 3:17...and 1 Cor 14:38...." [3] But the equal reactions end at the issue of faithfulness. Jesus cannot be unfaithful to us, even though

we are unfaithful to God. To do so would be to deny his essential (divine) nature of which his human nature is an expression, that is, the love of God toward his creation.

14. *avoid wrangling over words*: "What Paul is underlining here is the danger of getting involved in that kind of theological discussion which is in the end purely verbal, having nothing to do with the realities of the Christian religion." [4]

15. *present yourself to God as one approved by him...a worker rightly explaining the word of truth*: Since God sees our hearts he will know if our presentations are intended to impress arid theologians (not all theologians are arid), or to be faithful to the truth of Christ.

Luke 17:11-19

{11} On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.

{12} As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, {13} they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" {14} When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. {15} Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. {16} He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. {17} Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? {18} Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" {19} Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

A similar story appears in Mark 1:40-45. This lection is unique to Luke.

11. *going through the region between Samaria and Galilee*: One of the lepers whom Jesus heals is a Samaritan, nine are Jews. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus makes several contacts with Samaritans. Jesus' disciples are rebuffed when they try to arrange a place for Jesus to stay on his way to Jerusalem. They want to respond violently, but Jesus refuses (Luke 9:52-55). Next Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). And finally, this passage, in which Jesus heals a Samaritan leper, who returns to praise God. These have the effect (and possibly Luke's purpose) of legitimizing the mission to the Samaritans in Acts 8:5-25. Matthew 10:5b-6 reflects a contrary position held by other early Christians.

12. *ten lepers*: "The regulations of Numbers 5:2-3 specified that lepers should be put out of the camp. Leviticus 13:45 repeats that command and adds that lepers should wear torn clothes, let the hair of the head hang loose, and cry 'Unclean, unclean' when approached. Leviticus 14:2 ff. required a healed leper to show himself to a priest, to go through a series of washings and to observe a seven-day period of probation before he could be certified to return to the camp; see also Lev. 13:49." [5]

14. *as they went, they were made clean*: See 1 Kings 5:10-19.

16. *He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him*: "In honor-shame societies one does not thank social equals. Thanking superiors is honorable, but signifies that since the inferior person cannot adequately repay the superior, mutual obligation is being ended. The Samaritan thus affirms that he has no resources with which to repay Jesus' kindness." [6]

18. *this foreigner*: "Foreigner" (Greek: *allogenes*) is used only here in the New Testament. "Elsewhere it is found only on the inscription on the barrier in the temple at Jerusalem [No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death.]..." [7] In the LXX [*allogenes*] is used to translate the Hebrew *zar*, "outsider" in Exodus 29:33; Numbers 16:40 (17:5); Leviticus 22:10 (not of priestly descent); Obadiah 11 (not of Israelite descent), etc.; *bene-necar* (son of an alien land) Exodus 12:43, etc.; and *mamzer* (bastard) Zechariah 9:6. The variety of meanings all have in common the distinction of one who is not authorized to be in a certain place, or to perform a certain

ritual, or to enjoy certain privileges from those who are so authorized. Although the Samaritan is here called a "foreigner," "since a Samaritan was a follower of the Torah he was admitted into the temple of Herod." [8] Jesus' use of it about the Samaritan leper is an ironic reflection on the contempt in which Samaritans were held by Jews. The Samaritan whom they despise praises God while the Jewish lepers did not.

19. "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well": In our society disease is a malfunction of the physical systems. Healing is intended to restore the proper functioning of those systems. In the society of the story, leprosy was evidence of a dislocation within society. The leper was unclean and out of harmony with the community. Healing was focused on restoring a person to a proper state of being, not an ability to function physically. Jesus is "a spirit-filled prophet who vanquishes unclean spirits and a variety of illnesses and restores people to their place in the community." [9]

Reflection

The first lesson has been chosen to complement the healings of the lepers in the Gospel (though "leprosy" in the two cases was different). In both the first lesson and in the Gospel it is a "foreigner" recognizes the source of his healing and gives praise to God. The Psalm echoes Naaman's praise of God. For Luke the issue is that the Gospel is offered to all, and Samaritans upon whom Jews, and no doubt Christian Jews looked with scorn, have shown exemplary Christian behavior. "...a Samaritan, a member of a group to whom the Jews generally deny the external and internal religious presuppositions for attaining salvation, is granted that very salvation through Christian faith." [10]

Hymns [11]

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

520 --E--Give to Our
431 --D--Your Hand, O
487 --II--Let Us Ever
500 --II--Faith of Our

13 --II--Keep in Mind
264 --G--When All Your
767s, 823s/738v, 542, 212

Prayers of the People [12]

P or A: Our God is a God of liberation, lifting the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, gathering the sinner and the outcast into a common fellowship, and, through the Holy Spirit, calling many to the freeing power of the gospel today. We pray to our gracious God, saying, "Lord in your mercy", and respond, "Hear our prayer."

A: God of everlasting love, you do not abandon your people. Reveal the comfort of your presence when this world seems most bleak to us, and when our lives seem most empty. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: May your call to live justly in a world of injustice be seen as a blessing and not a hardship. Help us to bear the challenges of this call. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: For the ill and the dying, we pray to you, O God, that they might find healing and hope. We remember _____ together with their families and friends who keep vigil at their side. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: We pray for those who mourn the loss of a loved one, that their sadness may be turned into joyful anticipation of new life--for you are a God who brings life from death. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: May the words of our mouths and the actions of our daily living bless your holy name, Father. We think particularly of the gatherings of this congregation--meetings, youth events, Bible studies, and fellowship occasions--that these gatherings be holy and filled by your presence. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

P: Into your hands we lift up every concern which we have spoken here today, and every silent word of repentance, anxiety, and praise. We commend all these things to your care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Or [13]

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God who heals all who call on the Lord.

Deacon or other leader

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

For the peoples of all nations and for those seeking refuge.

For good weather, abundant fruits of the earth and peaceful times.

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

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, the poor and the oppressed, the hungry and the homeless.

For the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

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 the font of all life, hear the prayers we offer this day and help all peoples in their weakness to approach you in faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[1] Wayne Pitard, "Aram," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol. 1 A-C. (ed. by David Noel Freedman), New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 340.

[2] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 2001, p. 65.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 376.

[4] J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 191963, p. 182.

[5] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 379.

[6] *Loc. cit.*

[7] Friedrich Bushel, [aloneness], *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ed. by Gerhard Kittel. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, vol. 1, p. 266. See Acts 21:28-31 for the occasion when Paul was suspected of bringing "foreigners" into the Temple. For additional information about the inscription see Peretz Segal, "The Penalty of the Warning Inscription from the Temple of Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 39(1989) 79-84.

[8] Elias Bicker man, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History, II*. Leaden, E. J. Brill, 1980, p. 215.

[9] Malina, *Ibid.*, p. 316.

[10] Hans Dieter Betz, "The cleansing of the Ten Lepers (Luke 17:11-19)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90(1971)326.

[11] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

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

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