

# Proper 12

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## Pentecost 10 July 28, 2002

### Prayer of the Day

O God, your ears are open always to the prayers of your servants. Open our hearts and minds to you, that we may live in harmony with your will and receive the gifts of your Spirit; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### 1 Kings 3:5-12

{5} At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." {6} And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. {7} And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. {8} And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. {9} Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" {10} It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. {11} God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, {12} I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

5. *At Gibeon*: For background on Gibeon see Joshua 9; 2 Samuel 2:11-16, 21:1-6. Solomon sacrificed a thousand burnt offerings on the altar at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4).

*the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream*: Dreams were one of the recognized means of revelation (Genesis 20:3; 28:12; 31:11; 31:24; Numbers 12:6; 1 Samuel 28:6). However, dreams as a means of revelation can also be misleading (see Jeremiah 23:23-32).

6. *steadfast love...faithfulness...righteousness...uprightness*: These are covenant words describing the relationship between Yahweh and his people. *Hesed* is covenant loyalty. *Emeth* is faithfulness to the covenant requirements. *Tsedaqah* is conduct that keeps the law. And *yisrah* is straightness, both moral and physical.

7. *I am only a little child*: "By this phrase, Solomon means to point out that he is not up to the great task ahead." [1]

*I do not know how to go out or come in*: This is a figure of speech, merism, in which boundary conditions, are used to define the whole. It "...expresses the discharge of public duties, especially in war ; cf. 1 Sam 18:16...." [2] Solomon has described himself as a little child. He does not know how to be king, and walk in faithfulness as his father David did. That appears somewhat disingenuous.

9. *understanding mind*: "mind" translates the Hebrew word "heart," cf. verse 6. An understanding or receptive heart "implies patience to hear a case and understand it fully, the heart (*leb, lebab*) for the ancient Semite being the seat of the understanding. Here again there is a close parallel with Isa. 11.3, 'he will not decide by what he hears with his ears.'" [3]

*to discern between good and evil*: This is a figure of speech which simply means everything. Yahweh knows good and evil, that is, he knows everything. In 2 Samuel 14:17 David is described

as "like the angel of God, discerning good and evil," and in verse 20 as having "wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on earth."

*12. a wise and discerning mind:* Both "wise" and "discerning" have the sense of discrimination in judgment, the ability to grasp the significant points of a case and disregard evidence that is faulty or false.

*no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you:* The notion of "none like you" is almost exclusively reserved for God (Psalm 86:8; Jeremiah 10:6; 1 Chronicles 17:20, etc). Moses will be the pattern for a prophet "like you" (Deuteronomy 18:18). Solomon will be unique.

### **Psalm 119:129-136**

{129} Your decrees are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. {130} The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. {131} With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments. {132} Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your custom toward those who love your name. {133} Keep my steps steady according to your promise, and never let iniquity have dominion over me. {134} Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep your precepts. {135} Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes. {136} My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept.

Psalm 119 is an alphabetic Psalm. Eight verses begin with *aleph*, then eight verses, with *beth*, and eight verses with *gimmel*, and so on. The verses today are those that begin with Hebrew *pe*, "p". Only the verses for *aleph*, *beth*, and *he* are used in addition to these verses.

In this stanza the Psalmist uses "decrees," "words," "commandments," "precepts," "statutes," and "law" to refer to the *torah* of Yahweh.

In the shape of the lectionary the Psalm becomes a commentary on Solomon's quest for discernment and understanding.

### **Romans 8:26-39**

{26} Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. {27} And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. {28} We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. {29} For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. {30} And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. {31} What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? {32} He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? {33} Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. {34} Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. {35} Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? {36} As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." {37} No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. {38} For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, {39} nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*26. we do not know how to pray as we ought:* Literally, "we do not know for what we should pray." Like Solomon in the first lesson we are like little children and need to learn the ways of the spiritual life.

*Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words:* The Spirit is the source of all truly Christian prayer, both instructing us how and what to pray for, and also praying on our behalf when we are unable to pray.

*28. all things work together for good for those who love God:* "...it includes all of the items mentioned in vv 18-27: sufferings, destiny in glory, the groaning of creation, Christian hope, and perhaps even the Spirit... he scarcely means that Christians can rest their confidence in themselves in loving God, assured that all that happens to them will work for good. Rather, the

reason that all things work for good is not found in Christians themselves, but in God, who takes the initiative and sees that all things will work for good." [4]

29-30. *foreknew...predestined...called...justified...glorified*: "Paul... stresses the divine prevenience of the process of salvation, setting it forth in five steps, but his anthropomorphic language should not be too facily transposed into the *signa rationis* of later theological systems of predestination." [5] "Foreknew," to know personally with affection. "Predestine," God's gracious election. "Called," an invitation to faith and baptism. "justified," "the status of rectitude in God's sight." [6] "Glorified," This is the goal of God's plan, both as a process and as a goal.

31-39: The scene is a law court. We are the defendants. God is not the prosecutor, but our defender. Christ is too. And nothing can separate us from their love.

Because we can not pray properly God's Spirit intercedes for us. If God is for us then no one can bring any charge against us. God justifies us for the sake of Christ whom God gave up for us; no one can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

### **Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

{31} He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; {32} it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." {33} He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.".... {44} "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. {45} "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; {46} on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. {47} "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; {48} when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. {49} So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous {50} and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. {51} "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." {52} And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

See the study for Proper 10 for comments on Matthew 13.

31. *He put before them another parable*: The parables in verses 31-33 are told to them "them," the crowd, see verse 34. This is "a *terminus technicus*, it is his [Matthew's] formal designation for the Jewish crowds...." [7] This clause introduces the parables in 13:24, 31, and 33, which are told to the crowd. A parable is "an extended metaphor or simile" [8] which seeks to explain the obscure by relating it to the familiar.

*The kingdom of heaven is like...*: This phrase introduces the parables in 13:31, 33, 44, and with the addition of "again" verses 45 and 47. Each of the parables illustrates a characteristic or quality of the kingdom of heaven.

32. *it is the smallest of all the seeds*: "While black mustard seeds (*brassica nigra*) may have a diameter of little more than one millimeter, the shrub may reach a height of two or three meters, and thus...it is one of the largest vegetable plants....." [9]

*the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches*: The image is of the gathering of the people of God. In other places the images are triumphant. In Ezekiel 17:22-24, for example, a proud cedar. Here the image of the humble mustard seed does not have an implicit claim to triumphalism. The birds may gather in the bush, but the majesty of the kingdom is dependant on God's actions.

33. *yeast which a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour*: How much yeast is not indicated, but three measures of flour "is the equivalent of almost 40 liters, enough for a meal for more than 150 persons or for approximately 110 pounds of bread.... for forty liters of flour almost four pounds of leaven [sourdough] are needed" [10] Another measure of the size of the mixture is that it would be enough bread for a household of 36 people for a day. [11]

*until all of it was leavened*: The action of the yeast in the dough is not described, except to say

that all the four was leavened.

44-50: These parables are told to the disciples, not to the crowd.

44. *treasure hidden in a field which someone found and hid*: Like the yeast the treasure is "hidden." Then it is found and hidden again. The legal and ethical issue here is not dealt with. Rather the value of the treasure and the desire of the discoverer are the key issues. The parable does not encourage immoral or illegal means to gain the kingdom, but points to its surpassing value.

46. *one pearl of great value*: This parable is a corrective to the parable of the treasure in the field. Here the merchant does not hide the pearl, but sacrifices everything he has for it.

47-50. *a net thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind*: Jesus had told Peter and Andrew that he would make them fish for people (Matthew 4:19). Here he describes the catch as a mixed bag, something like the field that was planted with good seed and weeds. The conclusion one can draw is that being a part of the earthly community does not guarantee a part in the heavenly kingdom. Some quality, not defined here, is required: righteousness, faith....

51: The disciples say they have understood what Jesus has been saying.

52. *every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like....*: The disciples are described as scribes trained for the kingdom. The comparison with scribes of any kind is probably not what we would expect given Jesus' attitude toward scribes in general. The disciples are a new kind of scribe who provides for the household from the family treasure.

## Reflection

Solomon prays for understanding *to discern between good and evil*, so he might govern the people properly. Yahweh is pleased and grants him *a wise and discerning mind*. Solomon will surpass everyone in wisdom. The serpent said the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would enable Eve to be like God, "knowing good and evil." This is again the rhetorical figure, merism, which defines the whole by its boundaries. Solomon prays "to know all things on earth" like his father, David.

In the parables of the mustard seed (31-32); yeast (33); and treasure (44) the point is the disproportion between the initial conditions and the final result. A tiny seed provides shade for the birds; dough with yeast hidden in it expands dramatically; and a plain field conceals a rich treasure. The parable of the pearl (45-46) makes a point of the sacrifice of everything for the one thing of value. The parable of the dragnet is a picture of the separation of the evil and the righteous in the final judgment. The argument goes like this: the kingdom of heaven is hidden but it is of surpassing value. Those who have not sacrificed everything for it will come to know how much they have lost. It is a counterpart to the parable of the weeds and the wheat last Sunday. The sorting of the fish is left up the angels. Who of us would be able to say who are the worthless fish?

## Hymns [12]

*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

441 E--Eternal Spirit of

457/8 D--Jesus, Priceless Treasure

708s P--Psalm 105: Thanks

454 II--If God Himself

446 II--Whatever God Ordains

738v II--Healer of Our (823s)

682v II--Praise the Spirit (751s)

782v II--All My Hope

378 G--Amid the World's

468, 552, 805s, 340

## Prayers of the People [13]

A: It begins as the smallest seed, yet the Kingdom of Heaven grows into the greatest of shrubs

and becomes a tree. Let us pray that it might also grow among us, saying, "In faith we pray," and responding, "Lord hear us."

A: For Delores Hall and the people of Morobe, Papua New Guinea, that their vision of a peaceable kingdom filled with God's justice might be an inspiration to the Canadian church. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For those who work to bring healing to our community; for pastors, doctors, counselors, social workers, nurses, and food bank volunteers, that they might be honoured for the work they do. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For those members of our faith community who have AIDS and for those who care for them, that they might not be alone in their suffering. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For those enrolled for baptism that they might take seriously their call to bring reconciliation and wholeness to our broken world. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

A: For all who gather at this table of the Lord, that we might be for one another a family in whose midst sins are forgiven and new beginnings are encouraged. In faith we pray, C: Lord hear us.

P: Your Kingdom comes on its own, Loving God; we pray that it might also come to us. Amen.

**Or [14]**

*Presider or deacon*

Just as the Spirit intercedes with deep sighs, let us turn our hearts to the will of God and offer prayers for all peoples.

*Deacon or other leader*

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

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

For mercy, justice, and peace in the world.

For farmers and a good harvest, for travelers and those on vacation, and for safety from violent storms.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the dying, the poor and the oppressed, prisoners and captives, and for their families.

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

For ourselves, our families, our companions, and all those 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 wisdom, who searches the heart of every one, hear the prayers we offer you this day and gather us into the kingdom of heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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## **Notes**

[1] Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 2000, p. 186.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] John Gray, *1 & II Kings: A Commentary*. Second, Fully Revised Edition. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, p. 126.

[4] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 522.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 524-525.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 526.

[7] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction Criticism*. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1969, p. 19.

- [8] J. Dominic Crossan, "Parable," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. by David Noel Freedman). New York: Doubleday, vol. 5, 1992, p. 146.
- [9] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, p. 261.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- [11] Kingsbury, *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- [12] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0102.txt>
- [13] [http://www.worship.ca/text/int\\_a3.txt](http://www.worship.ca/text/int_a3.txt)
- [14] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>