

Proper 19

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September 14, 2003

Prayer of the Day

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of your grace, that, pursuing what you have promised, we may share your heavenly glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Isaiah 50:4-9

{4} The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens-- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. {5} The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. {6} I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. {7} The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; {8} he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. {9} It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

4. *the tongue of a teacher*: "Lit[erally] a **disciples'** (plu.) **tongue**...., perhaps a trained or practiced tongue.... The stress laid on the divine education of the Servant is connected with the fact that his ministry of consolation was almost a new departure in prophecy. In the hands of the earlier prophets the word of Jehovah had been like a hammer breaking the rock in pieces (Jer. xxiii. 29) rather than a dew reviving the spirit of the humble." [1]

the weary: The "anxious and despondent minds in Israel." [2]

to listen as those who are taught: The prophet listens to Yahweh's word each day, and with it sustains the hopeless.

6. The prophet did not seek to avoid dishonor but willingly accepted persecution and suffering at the hands of his enemies.

The picture of the patient, suffering of the servant of the Lord is repeated both in Jesus' sufferings at the hands of his Roman guards, and Paul's trials.

7. The vindication of the prophet is expressed in the terms of a legal process. The prophet and those who contend with him stand before the court. Yahweh helps the prophet, and he is vindicated and not disgraced. He can not be declared not guilty because of Yahweh's help. His adversaries will be worn out and be destroyed.

Psalms 116:1-9

{1} I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. {2} Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. {3} The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. {4} Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, save my life!" {5} Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. {6} The LORD protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. {7} Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. {8} For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. {9} I walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

3-4: The singer was in peril and called on Yahweh to save his/her life.

5-6a: The psalmist asserts those qualities upon which (s)he depends. Indeed, Yahweh acted to save him/her.

7-9: The singer now enjoys life in the presence of Yahweh.

The Psalm is a song of thanksgiving, praising Yahweh who heard the voice of the singer and saved him (her) from distress and death. In the lectionary it is a response to the description of the sufferings of the servant of God who is rejected by the people. (S)he will be vindicated and his/her sufferings will be ended.

James 3:1-12

{1} Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. {2} For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. {3} If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. {4} Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. {5} So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! {6} And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. {7} For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, {8} but no one can tame the tongue--a restless evil, full of deadly poison. {9} With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. {10} From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. {11} Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? {12} Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

1-2. Not many...should become teachers...: Teachers, like all, are liable to err. Because of their responsible position they will be judged more strictly than others. Therefore, only those who can avoid errors in their teaching should become teachers.

Anyone who makes no mistakes ...able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle: Such a teacher is perfect and is able to control himself, as with a bridle. It is the "bridle" that leads to the treatise on control of the tongue. This takes up the metaphor already mentioned in 1:26.

3-4: Big horses and big ships are guided and controlled by small bits and small rudders.

5: A small fire can destroy a great forest. The tongue is a small member, with the implication that it can cause great mischief.

6-10: The tongue is a small member of the body, but it cannot be controlled. It is unruly and restless and is dangerous to human society. It both blesses God and curses those created in his image; it ought not to be.

11-12. Does a spring...both fresh and brackish water.... Can a fig tree...olives, or a grapevine figs: Two metaphors to show the incompatibility of blessing and cursing. The second metaphor is used by Jesus in Matthew 7:16: "You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?"

No more can salt water yield fresh: The spring and the fig trees and grapevines cannot behave contrary to their nature any more than salt water can become fresh.

The tongue is an unruly member of the body, it cannot be controlled and acts on its own with poisonous results. The tongue does not recognize the absurdity of blessing God and cursing those created in his image. Salt water and fresh, figs and olives, blessing and cursing are all contraries. Christians must control their tongues.

Mark 8:27-38

{27} Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" {28} And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." {29} He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." {30} And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. {31} Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

{32} He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. {33} But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." {34} He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. {35} For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. {36} For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? {37} Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? {38} Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

27. *Who do people say that I am:* "...in antiquity the question was not the modern one of the identity of an individual, but of the position and power that derived from an ascribed or acquired honor status.... Jesus wants to find out what his status is both among the public and among his new (fictive) kin." [3]

29. *You are the Messiah:* "The final designation, 'Messiah' is a clear status designation that focuses in unmistakable terms the reassessment of Jesus that has been going on. It asserts that his authority to proclaim the reign of God is divinely authorized. It also identifies Jesus with his fictive rather than biological family." [4]

30. *he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him:* "Lest so audacious a claim (not among the proposals in 6:14-16) be made in public, however, Jesus demands silence." [5]

31. *he began to teach them:* The keyword "teach" occurs in this lesson, too. Here Jesus teaches his disciples that he will be the one who will undergo suffering and dishonor. All that was true of the prophet in Isaiah will be true of Jesus as well. Jesus will trust God to protect his honor, and will refrain from curses and words of anger. Those who follow him must be willing to accept that reality.

31-33: "In a society that assumed all goods, including honor, were limited and that was deeply suspicious of all attempts to rise above the level of one's birth, the status now being accorded Jesus by both the public and his own surrogate family would be explosive stuff indeed. Peter, perhaps naively, thinks that the status claim can be made to stick in public without trouble. Peter's rebuke is interpreted as a test of Jesus' loyalty to God; hence Peter is a 'Satan,' a tester of loyalties." [6]

34: Others may become a part of Jesus "family" by "denying themselves," that is, their biological families, taking up the cross of such a drastic action, and being willing to acknowledge his loyalty to Jesus by following him.

34. *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me:* Jesus invites others to follow him, but he warns them as to the cost of their discipleship. The disciple is to "follow" the master, imitating his behavior and attitude. To do this they must "deny" themselves, that is, they must put aside all their fondest hopes and dreams of comfort and success, and commit themselves to following God's will wherever it may lead them. Implicit is the expectation that those who follow Jesus will also suffer as he will. When the Son of man comes with power, he will in like fashion be ashamed of 'this generation.'"

37. *ashamed of me:* "To be ashamed of a person is to dissociate oneself from that person, to not recognize that person's claims to honor, to distance oneself from that person's honor rating." [7]

38. *this adulterous and sinful generation:* "The phrase "indicates that they are essentially of questionable parentage, hence quite without honor" capable only of "consistently dishonorable conduct, conduct unworthy of a human being—let alone God's people." [8]

Reflection

The common theme of the lessons is the perseverance of the believer in the face of rejection and dishonor. The word common to three of the lessons is "teach." Dishonor and

rejection are to be expected by those who serve the Lord. Jesus warns his disciples, "those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." James warns against seeking to become teachers for they will be judged strictly.

He warns against the malicious use of the tongue, presumably by one who is being attacked. The true disciple will use the tongue to bless, even under attack, not to curse. In the Prayer of the Day God is addressed as one who declares his "almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity" on those who want to be his disciples, but who cannot survive the rigors of such discipleship. Only because of the graciousness of the Father of Jesus can we hope to share his heavenly glory. "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." To be a Christian is not for the faint hearted, nor even for the strong, but only for the faithful, who dare to trust the Lord.

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

247 E Holy Majesty, before
398 D "Take Up Your"
532 P How Great Thou
561 P For the Beauty
757vP Creating God

726vP Oh, Sing to
436 II All Who Love
406 G Take My Life,
837s, 455, 504, 810s/785v

Prayers of the People [10]

God of ultimate purpose, we praise you for even summoning us to service. We want to follow but we are chained in place by our fears. Send your Holy Spirit with courage to free us. Give us strength beyond our weakness. Help us to learn from our worship what it means to deny self and take up the cross and follow Jesus. **God who calls us to serve hear our prayer.**

God of male and female alike, bless the journey of all of our boards and committees that all your servants may have opportunity to speak and be heard, to know and to act. Bless the Evangelical Lutheran Women of our Church and their newly elected board. Give them wisdom and vision. Build trust and a spirit of mission that they may know your call and serve you fully. **God who calls us to serve hear our prayer.**

Or [11]

Presider or deacon

With our tongues we bless the Lord and Father and beg for mercy on all in need.

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 mercy, peace, and justice among all peoples.

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

For the sick and the suffering, travelers by land, by water, and by air, prisoners, captives, and their families, and all those in desperate 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, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God

through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

God of infinite mercy, hear the prayers we offer this day and save our lives through the good news of your Messiah, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] A.F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapters XL-LXVI*, Cambridge: University Press, 1954, pp. 113f.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 114

[3] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 229.

[4] *Loc. cit.*

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

[7] *Loc. cit.*

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclb9900.txt>

[10] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt

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