

Proper 17



Pentecost 15 September 1, 2002

Prayer of the Day

O God, we thank you for your Son who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow his commands; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jeremiah 15:15-21

{15} O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance do not take me away; know that on your account I suffer insult. {16} Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. {17} I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation. {18} Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail. {19} Therefore thus says the LORD: If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them. {20} And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the LORD. {21} I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

15. O Lord, you know: Yahweh knows the suffering Jeremiah has endured as a result of his attempt to be faithful to the message Yahweh has given him.

remember me and visit me: Jeremiah pleads for Yahweh's to be aware of his plight.

bring down retribution for me on my persecutors: "Jrm is asking Yahweh to exert his authority in such a way that he, Jrm, will be vindicated and his opponents justifiably discomfited." [1]

forbearance: In Exodus 34:6 Yahweh is described as "slow to anger." Jeremiah prays that Yahweh's slowness to anger will not lead to his death.

do not take me away: The meaning here is "take me away to death." See Job 1:21, "...the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

on your account I suffer insult: See Psalm 69:7, 9 for the same thought.

16-17: Jeremiah describes his delight in Yahweh's words. He took his responsibility seriously: he "did not sit in the company of merrymakers." Compare Psalm 1:1, "sit in the seat of scoffers."

18. my pain...my wound: These express his seeming abandonment by Yahweh.

you are to me like a deceitful brook: Jeremiah is as disappointed in Yahweh as the farmer is in a stream that has no water.

19. If you turn back, I will take you back: Yahweh does not accept Jeremiah's criticism. Instead, Yahweh declares his willingness to accept Jeremiah's repentance ("turn back").

you shall stand before me: Jeremiah will be restored to Yahweh's favor.

what is precious...what is worthless: "What is precious" are the words that became a joy and delight to Jeremiah. "What is worthless" is Jeremiah's complaint.

you shall serve as my mouth: Jeremiah will again be Yahweh's prophet.

they...will turn to you: Jeremiah's opponents will be compelled to submit to Jeremiah, not the other way around.

20-21: "Yahweh...promises to stand by Jrm and guarantee his safety from all attacks from his people." [2]

20: "A virtual repetition of the call; cf. 1:18-19." [3]

Psalm 26:1-8

{1} Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. {2} Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind. {3} For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you. {4} I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; {5} I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked. {6} I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O LORD, {7} singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds. {8} O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides.

"Psalm 26 belongs among the prayers of one who is falsely accused.... Pursued by accusers, the petitioner flees to the sanctuary, finds asylum there, affirms his innocence, and appeals to Yahweh as the righteous judge.... Such a procedure takes place in the sanctuary in Jerusalem again and again. In 1 Kings 8:31ff. we read: 'If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and comes and swears his oath before thine altar in this house, then hear thou in heaven, and act, and judge thy servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct upon his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.'" [4] Jeremiah might have prayed such a prayer in the situation described in the first lesson.

4-5. *I do not sit with the worthless.... I...will not sit with the wicked:* Jeremiah 15:17; also Psalm 1:1.

Romans 12:9-21

{9} Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; {10} love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. {11} Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. {12} Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. {13} Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. {14} Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. {15} Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. {16} Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. {17} Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. {18} If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. {19} Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." {20} No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." {21} Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

"Having asserted the unity of Christians in the 'one body,' Paul now goes on to give a series of counsels for such Christians. They are the demands that life in the Christian community makes of Christians." [5] Many Christians view righteousness as based on the hatred of evil, the use of fire to fight fire and seeking retribution upon the enemy. Paul warns us not to depend on our own wisdom, but rather to leave vengeance to God. Jesus' admonition, *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Matthew 5:44) which underlies all truly Christian righteousness is taken up here. The righteous life of Christians is not just good, it is a particular kind of goodness, a goodness grounded in genuine love and active in doing good to one's enemies. We are not to allow our efforts on behalf of righteousness to destroy the good. [6] Rather than using evil to overcome evil, we are to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

Matthew 16:21-28

{21} From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. {22} And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." {23} But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." {24} Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. {25} For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

{26} For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? {27} "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. {28} Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Parallels: Mark 8:31-9:1; Luke 9:18-27. Jesus and his disciples are in the district of Caesarea Philippi (verse 13), 20 miles north of Galilee, outside the traditional boundaries of the land of Israel. Contrary to Jesus' instruction in 10:5 to *Go nowhere among the Gentiles*, he has led them here himself.

21. *on the third day be raised*: See Hosea 6:2: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him."

23. *Satan...you are setting your mind...on human things*: Peter's thinking has been so perverted that it has become satanic. The corollary is that human thoughts about what is right and what ought to be, are to be shunned as evil. Human nature is, by definition, sinful and unclean.

24-25: Those who follow Christ are to deny themselves (their human nature), and take up their cross (as Jesus took up his cross). They are to lose their life for Jesus' sake. They are not to forfeit their life in order to gain the good will of the world.

life: "'Life' (yuc» [psuche]) is used in two senses—that of mere physical existence and that of the true and essential self, the 'soul'." [7] To seek mere physical existence will cause the sacrifice of the true self.

26. *what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life*: See Matthew 10:39; Luke 14:27; Luke 17:33; John 12:25 for parallels to 25-26.

27. *Son of Man*: Three meanings: 1. a first-person singular self-reference "I," 2. a human being, 3. an eschatological figure with whom Jesus identifies himself. In this place the third meaning is clearly the one intended.

is to come with his angels: See Matthew 25:31-46 for Jesus' description of the appearance of the Son of Man "in his glory, and all the angels with him."

28. "The question about the Son of Man (vs. 13) is finally answered by reference to the judgment that awaits even the disciples and the reward that faithfulness will receive." [8]

[Matthew 17:1-2: "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white:" Peter's confession is confirmed by the events on the mountain.]

Reflection

The lessons today reflect a theme in several of the Gospels in the last several weeks that deal with the presence of evil in the world, and how Christians are to deal with it. Proper 5, Jesus was not sent to the righteous but to sinners. Proper 7, Followers of Jesus should be prepared to experience the same reception as Jesus received. Proper 11, We should not try to root out the evil around us, but wait until God takes care of it. Proper 15, Evil does not come from outside of us, but from within us.

"...Jeremiah, protesting that he has been faithful in the discharge of his office, cries out in anguish at the hatred and the loneliness that this has brought him, and even complains that Yahweh has failed him in his hour of need. Answering this outburst, and concluding the chapter (vss. 19-21), is a 'private oracle' addressed to Jeremiah telling him, in effect, that he must purge himself of such sentiments if he wishes to continue in the prophetic office, and renewing to him the promise of divine aid if he will obey." [9]

The test of the faithful life is not success, but obedience. He who seeks to preserve his/her life will lose it. Peter is given the authority to declare a course of action or conduct to be permitted or forgiven. Today, in the second lesson, we are called on to bless those who persecute us and not to repay evil for evil. Even Jeremiah, who declared the message God gave him, was persecuted by

those who did not want to hear it. The Psalmist prays for the vindication of the faithful and innocent.

Hymns [\[10\]](#)

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

470 E--Praise and Thanks
413 D--Father Eternal,
756 II--Lord, You Give
398 G--"Take Up Your"

455 G--"Come, Follow Me,"
810s G--Weary of All (785v)
429, 487, 767s, 422

Prayers of the People [\[11\]](#)

P or A: Loving one another in mutual affection and outdoing one another in showing honor, let us pray for the needs of all people, saying, "Let our hearts seek God," and responding, "Turn our hearts to you, O God."

A: Make us aware of the holy ground on which we stand before you, O God. Deepen our worship, our awe before the fire of your presence. Receive your church's offering of praise and prayer, blessing those who lead it, presiders, assistants, readers, and musicians. Let our hearts seek God. Turn our hearts to you, O God.

A: O Great I AM, look upon the desperation of poor nations, deep in debt. Send them deliverers and teach us to live so that our consumerism does not compound their misery and we learn to share resources with those left with nothing. Let our hearts seek God. Turn our hearts to you, O God.

A: You send us those in need so that we may serve Christ in them. We pray for prisoners and those who work with them in rehabilitation and chaplaincy. Free any whom our society has wrongly imprisoned and bring hope to all who wait for them. Let our hearts seek God. Turn our hearts to you, O God.

A: We remember those who suffer from illnesses, especially those who may be living out their final days. Give both them and us patience and perseverance in prayer. For the sake of these we name _____, let our hearts seek God. Turn our hearts to you, O God.

A: Many are preparing to return to places of learning. Make teachers wise and students eager to learn and show respect and honor for one another. Prepare us all to receive the Wisdom of God. Let our hearts seek God. Turn our hearts to you, O God.

P: Help us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, living in harmony with one another and entrusting all our needs and loved ones into your care, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or [\[12\]](#)

Presider or deacon

As the one body of Christ, presenting our many bodies as a living sacrifice, let us offer prayers to the Lord our God for all in danger and 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 students and teachers, and all those returning to their studies.

For workers and their organizations, and for those who employ and manage them.

For farmers and 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, 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 glory, who calls us to take up our cross and follow Jesus, hear the prayers we offer this day and so transform the peoples of this earth that they may know your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Notes

[1] William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, p. 457.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 465.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.110.

[4] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, pp. 325f.

[5] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New York: Doubleday, 1993, p. 651.

[6] “Certainly our sins and faults destroy the good. But our efforts after the good also destroy it.” Charles Williams, “Pardon and Justice,” *The Image of the City and Other Essays*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 133.

[7] Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction and Commentary*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981, p. 359.

[8] Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975, p.347.

[9] John Bright, *Jeremiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., pp. 111f.

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

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

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