

Lent 5

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April 6, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, our redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be your messengers of forgiveness and hope in the world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, that we may follow your commands and proclaim your reign of love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen

Jeremiah 31:31-34

{31} The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. {32} It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. {33} But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. {34} No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

31. *a new covenant*: Jeremiah "knows of a new covenant which Yahweh will conclude with Israel in place of the covenant they had broken (31:31ff.). To be sure this will consist of doing the *torah*, "law," but will differ from the old covenant in that people will know and perform the will of God out of inner motivation. Forgiveness of sins is the basis of this new covenant (v. 34)." [1]

Israel & Judah: It is commonly assumed that "house of Israel" is an addition to Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant with the "house of Judah."

32. *the covenant I made with their ancestors & a covenant which they broke*: The covenant that will be replaced is the Sinai covenant, the stipulations of which (the law) were broken by the people.

I was their husband, says the Lord: The word for husband here, *baal*, "baal," properly means "lord," or "owner." It was also used as a proper name for the Canaanite god of fertility. There is probably a word play here suggesting the reason why they broke the covenant.

33. *I will put my law within them & write it on their hearts*: Paul uses similar imagery in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. To write the law in their hearts means to insert it into their minds and wills so that it becomes a natural way of thinking and acting, not a requirement to be fulfilled.

I will be their God, and they shall be my people: Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:3, 12, "If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully. I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people." This formula is used several times in Jeremiah, (11:4; 24:7; 32:38), and also in Ezekiel (11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27).

34. *I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more*: Repentance is not required. Yahweh forgives their sin so that they may "know me, from the least of them to the greatest." The covenant of Sinai was grounded in keeping the covenant law. The new covenant is grounded in the sovereignty of Yahweh, so does what human beings cannot do, forgive sins and regulate human behavior.

Psalm 51:1-12

{1} Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. {2} Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. {3} For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. {4} Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. {5} Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. {6} You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. {7} Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. {8} Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. {9} Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. {10} Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. {11} Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. {12} Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

"The situation to which the reader and petitioner of Psalm 51 is to go back is reported in 2 Samuel 12. H.J. Stoebe correctly emphasizes: It would now be completely wrong to simply discard such titles as fictional inventions and later accretions to the text. On the contrary, they carry considerable weight with us, for they are living proof of how the community heard and understood; they are, so to say, illustrations and, as such, evidence both of faith and of first interpretation." [3]

1. *steadfast love* mercy: These are qualities of the covenant God, which can be depended on.

1-3. *transgressions* iniquity sin: Three words for sin: "transgression", rebellion against Yahweh; "iniquity", intentions contrary to Yahweh's will; "sin"; to fail or fall short.

wash me cleanse me: "In the background here, without question, there are procedures of cultic cleansing acts of cultic lustration in which the penitent let himself be bathed or he himself washed himself and his clothes, while at the same time forgiveness of sins was pronounced over him." [4]

4. *Against you, you alone, have I sinned*: David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord," 2 Samuel 12:13.

5. *I was born guilty*: "The petitioner wants to say that the primordial cause, the root cause of my existence, is interwoven with corruption. Statements of this kind in the OT are to be understood neither as genetically caused nor one-sidedly moral or sexist, nor as having a didactic tendency. Rather, in the final analysis this is a matter of shedding light in the presence of Yahweh on the final depths and basic foundations of human existence. The total depravity that is determinative for humans from the beginning is here acknowledged (Gen. 8:21; Job 14:4; 15:14f.; 25:4; Ps. 143:2; John 3:6)." [5]

6. *teach me wisdom*: "the insight into the hidden depths of the degeneracy of guilt is not the result of human contemplation, but a gift of divine communication and revelation." [6]

7. *hyssop*: "When the singer in v. 7 prays for purgation with hyssop, rituals of cleansing of the cultic site are being referred to." [7]

8. *bones you have crushed*: The petitioner's bones are broken. But the psalmist does not pray for healing, only for forgiveness.

9: The singer prays that Yahweh will cover his/her sin and guilt.

10. *Create in me*: This is the point of contact with the first lesson in which Yahweh says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." Only God can create a new heart filled with a spirit of righteousness.

11-12: The psalmist asks not to be separated from God, but rather restored and renewed.

Or

Psalm 119:9-16

{9} How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. {10} With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. {11} I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. {12} Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes. {13}

With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. {14} I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. {15} I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. {16} I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

In this section of the Psalm every verse begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the letter ב, *beth*.

10: The Psalmist prays that God will not let him/her stray from God's commandments.

11. *I treasure your word in my heart, so I may not sin against you.* The heart is the center of thought and will. This is the point of contact with the first lesson. God's word, treasured in the psalmist's heart, prevents sin.

12-16. *statutes* *ordinances* *decrees* *precepts* *ways*: Synonyms for commandments in verse 10. The psalmist will exercise him/her-self in learning, meditating on, and living by God's commandments, the law written on the heart.

Hebrews 5:5-10

{5} So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; {6} as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." {7} In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. {8} Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; {9} and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, {10} having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

5. *the one who said to him*: That Jesus had been called the Son of God by God at his baptism and again at the Transfiguration was apparently well enough known so that "the one who said" that was known to be God. God's designation is in accordance with Psalm 2:7.

6. *a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek*: Melchizedek was the priest of *Elyon*, "God Most High (Genesis 14:18)," and in Psalm 110:4 David is called "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." "Melchizedek, according to the sacred courtly view, was the type, i.e., the prototype and precursor of the Davidic dynasty. Abraham bowed to Melchizedek and gave him a tithe. Therefore the later Israelites and Judeans have every reason to submit to Yahweh's anointed and to give him the tenth" [8]

7: The connection of verse 7 is with Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-39 and parallels). While the Gospel tradition suggests that Jesus' prayer to escape death was not answered positively, Hebrews sees the resurrection as the answer to Jesus' prayer. "this picture of Jesus at prayer cannot be simply derived from any known tradition on the subject. The language of the verse does, however, correspond quite closely to a traditional Jewish ideal of a righteous person's prayer, an ideal based on language in the psalms and developed explicitly in Hellenistic Jewish sources." [9]

8. "The force of the remark is that Jesus is not an ordinary son, who might indeed be expected to learn from suffering (12:4-11), but the eternal Son. Suffering and death are not, however, incompatible with that status; they are, as Hebrews constantly emphasizes, an essential part of the Son's salvific work. Jesus is presented as one who learns obedience in the midst of suffering because that is what the addressees are called upon to do. A fundamental affirmation of Hebrews is that Jesus was obedient to God's will from the start of his earthly career (10:5-10). Thus, he can learn obedience only in the sense that he comes to appreciate fully what conformity to God's will means. He can be a model for them [those to whom the letter was addressed] in their attempt to be obedient to God's will." [10]

John 12:20-33

{20} Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. {21} They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." {22} Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. {23} Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. {24} Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. {25} Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. {26} Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. {27} "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. {28} Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." {29} The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." {30} Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. {31} Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. {32} And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." {33} He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

20. *the festival*: The Passover (John 20:1).

some Greeks: "not one strictly of the Greek race but one of non-Jewish birth." [11]
"for the Evangelist they represent the Greek world in general, and thus also the pagan world." [12]

21-22: The request to see Jesus is passed from Philip to Andrew until it reaches Jesus.

23-27: In John 2:4 Jesus tells his mother, "My time has not yet come." In 7:30 and 8:20 Jesus' enemies cannot arrest him because his hour has not yet come. Now Jesus declares that his "hour" the time of his glorification has arrived. Jesus acceptance of his hour, which will involve his death, becomes a model for believers.

28: In response to Jesus' request that God glorify His name, a voice from heaven (audible to the crowd, verse 29) speaks for the sake of those who heard it (verse 30).

31: What is happening is the judging of the world and the driving out of the ruler of the world. This is what is *really* going on, whatever it may seem to the unopened eye.

32. *when I am lifted up will draw all people to myself*: Jesus describes the purpose of his crucifixion in terms of his earlier statement to Nicodemus (John 3:14).

33. *the kind of death he was to die*: One in which he was lifted up, that is, crucifixion. "Lifting" in John also conveys the idea of "exaltation." So, Jesus death is a crucifixion, but it is also the glorification promised by the voice from heaven in verse 28.

Reflection

"Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant sets forth an optimism of grace within the framework of the Mosaic covenant. He envisions a metastatic change in Israel, that is, a reform through a change in the constitution of being, with the result that the torah will be implanted in the heart and there will be a complete identity between man's will and God's will (see 24:7!)." [2]

Jesus, the Son of God, is our high priest. He is the mediator of our eternal salvation. His death is the means by which all people are brought into a new relationship with God. Jeremiah proclaimed a new covenant, one in which God's law would be written in the hearts of his people. God will forgive our sins, and we will find delight in his word. "The issue in the text (Jeremiah 31) is not 'Jew/Christian,' but as the Gospel reading for this Sunday has it, any newness worked through discontinuity (death), so that both Jews and Christians face the nullification of what is old for the sake of the newness of God." [16]

Hymns [13]

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

95 --E--Glory Be to
196 --D--Praise the Lord,
353 --I--May We Your
701v --I--What Feast of
511 --P--Renew Me, O

732v --P--Create in Me
118 --II--Sing, My Tongue
105 --G--A Lamb Goes
658v --G--The Word of God
310, 742s, 344, 207

Prayers of the People [14]

A: At the time of the Passover festival, the Greeks gathered and wished to see Jesus. Their coming moved Jesus to speak of his "glorification", his death. Like the seed that must die to itself to bear fruit, a follower of Jesus must lose life to save it. We pray, then, "In dying we live, O Christ," and respond, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the impenitent and unbelieving.

P: By faithful proclamation from our pulpits, let your Spirit penetrate deep into those who resist your word, O God. Make it known that you desire truth in the secret heart. Convict, cleanse, and counsel by your gospel. In dying we live, O Christ. C: Amen.

A: Let us intercede before our God on behalf of those who daily know suffering and death.

P: Bring caring angels to those who waste away in pain and anguish. Grant gifted researchers to uncover necessary cures. Let the light of hope come to those beset by AIDS, cancer, cholera, typhus, leprosy, muscular dystrophy, M.S., Alzheimer's, and other destroyers of life and health. In dying we live, O Christ. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for our congregation and its workers.

P: Guiding Spirit, we commend to you our pastor(s), our counselors, our staff, our committees, and all who pursue a worthy life for our congregation. Let the gospel of Jesus the Christ, motivate and inspire an effective outreach to the unenlightened and unpersuaded. In dying, we live, O Christ. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those who prepare for membership in the church.

P: Revealing Spirit, open wide an understanding of forgiveness as essential, relational, and continuing in all aspects of the Christian walk. In dying, we live, O Christ. C: Amen.

Or [15]

Presider or deacon

God made Christ a high priest for our salvation. As we prepare for the paschal feast, let us earnestly offer prayers and supplications to God through his Son.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsors.

For all the peoples of the earth and for mercy, justice, and peace.

For the sick and the suffering, and for all who are in danger or need.

For the dying and the dead.

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Presider

Blessed are you, God of eternal life, who lifted up your Son from death. Receive the prayers we offer this day for all who walk in darkness, and make your people children of light. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

[1] G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old*

Testament, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975. Vol. II, Revised Edition, p. 277.

[2] Bernhard W. Anderson, ♦Exodus and Covenant in Second Isaiah and Prophetic Tradition, ♦ *Magnalia Dei The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*. (ed. By Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976, p. 352.

[3] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-19: A Commentary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, p. 501.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 502.

[5] K. Condon, ♦The Biblical Doctrine of Original Sin, ♦ *Irish Theological Quarterly* 34(1967)20-36.

[6] Kraus, *Ibid.*, p. 504.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 500.

[8] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956, p. 174-176.

[9] Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989, pp. 148f.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[11] C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*. London: S.P.C.K., 1962, p. 351.

[12] Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, p. 96.

[13] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

[14] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b1.txt

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

[16] Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R. Gaventa, James D. Newsome, *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary based on the NRSV. Year B*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p. 232.