

19th Sunday in Pentecost 2020

Readings - Exodus 32:1-14, Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23, Philippians 4:1-9, Matthew 22:1-14

Introduction - Intercession is powerful and biblical. Many heroes of God are seen in the act of intercession with God concerning the affairs of men. Sometimes it can come across as arguing with God. In Jewish tradition, the act of arguing with God is not objectionable or sinful. Of course, it all depends on who is doing the arguing and over what subject we are arguing about.

Common Theme - Our actions are important and have consequences. Inappropriate action, or sin, has negative consequences. Positive action can be intercession, that is being the mediator between heaven and earth. Not only does the prayers of a righteous man have the power to prevail (James 5), but as we see in the person of Jesus, the role of mediator between man and God has the power to bring atonement.

Hebraic Perspective (on the Gospel passage) - After the return from captivity in Babylon things were different for the Jewish people. There was no king, prophecy was on the decline, and the reconstructed Temple became corrupt only with the priesthood. The only thing that was sure and solid was the Torah, the teaching and instructions of God. The importance of reading, study, and the putting into practice of God's Word became a high priority. Parables develop in this period to aid in studying the Bible and making God's Word practical.

Reading #1; Exodus 32:1-14 - This passage considers two topics. The first is Avoda Zara translated as idolatry but literally means Strange Worship. And the second is the role of the Mediator. What exactly did the Israelites think they were worshipping when they made a golden calf? The Hebrew word in verse 1 is Elohim which is the word for God. Did the Israelites want to worship God or do we translate it as 'gods'. Aaron constructs a calf of molten gold. In the ancient world, gods rode on the backs of animals. In this case in Exodus the Golden Calf is not the god, the god is the invisible thing riding the calf. Which of course is nothing, as there was nothing riding the calf. The Israelites indeed engage in strange worship (idolatry) by worshipping nothing. A common problem in today's society is indeed the worship of nothing! In response, God takes away the title of 'My people' and replaces it with 'your people' and then says to Moses to 'leave Me' while He is about to bring wrath on Israel. At this point, Moses then enters into negotiations with God over His anger and looming judgment on Israel using three arguments. Moses reminds God that the Israelites are His people, He has called them out of Egypt. Secondly, Moses notes that God's reputation is at stake and thirdly, Moses reminds God of the Patriarchs. Paul does the same in Romans 11. Moses becomes a true intercessor.

Reading #2; Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23 - The Psalm begins with the Goodness of God who has performed mighty acts of Love. We learn from this that love is not an emotion, it is an action. Love is something you can see. The psalmist says that the blessed are those who act justly in obedience to God's teachings but he also, acknowledges that we have all sinned against His

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instructions, just like the generation in the Wilderness. The Psalm also acknowledges the role of Moses the Mediator saving that generation from destruction and judgement. This reminds those who are praying this psalm of the saving power of true intercession.

Reading #3; Philippians 4:1-9 - Paul is the intercessor here in the Epistle, urging the Philippians to mediate between disputing believers in the community. He has the role models of Moses and Jesus before him. We are to be like the Messiah, bridging the gap and binding together the community, holding onto the good, the lovely, the praiseworthy, and admirable. Both within the household of faith but also in our intercessions before the Lord, which we present as prayers and petitions in requests to the Lord. Later in his letter to Timothy, Paul specifically calls on Timothy to offer intercession prayers for those in authority.

Reading #4; Matthew 22:1-14 - The parable of the Wedding Banquet is about how to live your life before Judgement Day. Parables are usually not eschatological, largely they are practical. The parable describes multiple invitations. The initial invitees have lame excuses which ultimately leads to open rebellion, eliciting a harsh response by the King. Here we can think of the wrath God had intended for the Israelites after the golden calf incident. The last invitation that the King sends out is to everyone, the good and the bad. The invitations in both cases have been sent ahead of time. All those called have had the time to prepare. And this is the key to the parable. The practical warning is 'if you are invited then be prepared'. Excuses will not suffice.

Hebraic Context - In Jewish exegesis beginnings and ends often occur in a similar fashion and perhaps on or around the same day. When David hid from Saul in a cave at Ein Gedi he had opportunity to murder King Saul, however, instead, he cut the royal robe and displayed it to Saul, bringing shame to Saul. Rabbinical exegesis notes this was not the appropriate thing to do against the Lord's Anointed, that is that despite King Saul being evil he was still anointed by the prophet Samuel to be King over Israel. So what should have been the correct action by David? David should have simply remained hidden in the cave. Instead, he brought shame on the Lord's anointed. At the end of David's life, the text says he could not keep warm, his clothing no longer functioned the way it was supposed to. David had abused the royal clothing of Saul and now his own royal clothing no longer could bring warmth.

Clothing is important, it has a function and reflects position and title. In the Parable of the Wedding Banquet clothing is a metaphor for having prepared ourselves for the Wedding, that is in following the teachings of Jesus. One should never do a Commandment and expect a reward. Our true heart attitude should be to please God simply for the desire to please Him. He has extended to us an invitation, we are called and need to come prepared, our hearts and actions need to be in the right place. Our 'clothes' need to be right to honour the King, dishonour gets you thrown out.

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ACNA Addendum

Introduction - The ACNA readings associate the themes of God's present provision and future messianic banquet (the marriage feast of the Lamb) among the afflictions in the world. We can acknowledge the difficulties and tribulations of this world, even recognize the looming judgment in Day of the Lord, and yet maintain hope and assurance in God's continued provision and blessing.

Isaiah 25:1-9 - The context prior to this passage, is the judgment that is coming to the world. It is a universal tribulation affecting the whole earth. This passage demonstrates the heart of the believer that can praise God even during the midst of devastation and tribulation. The destruction is total in that even 'death' is swallowed up forever. However the psalmist acknowledges that God is faithful and that within the tribulation God remains a refuge for the poor, weak, and needy. He will wipe away tears and prepare a victory banquet for His people. Prophetically this has been taken to refer to the victory banquet of the Messiah. This becomes the backdrop for the Parable of the Wedding Banquet in the Gospel.

Psalms 23 - This well-known psalm of David also reflects on the heart of the believer who can acknowledge that God is with us even in times of darkness and the shadow of death. The psalm also appreciates the provision that God gives even in the presence of enemies. Despite God being the almighty King of the Universe, the psalm comforts us by recognizing God in the personal sense as 'my shepherd'.

Philippians 4:4-13 - Paul admonishes us to remain joyful in the face of trial and persecution. We are exhorted not to be anxious in our present circumstances knowing that the Lord is present in our communities. Despite the difficulties around us, we can have the peace of God because the God of peace is with us. Here Paul provides a little of his own testimony, showing that he too has been both in desperate need, and well supplied and that in all situations he draws his strength from the Lord.