

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany (A)

Isaiah 9.1-4 Psalm 27.1, 5-13 1 Corinthians 1.10-18 Matthew 4.12-23

Isaiah 9.1-4

1. This lesson is taken from a longer passage (8.23-9.6) which forms the conclusion of Isaiah's memoirs. Earlier (7.14-15) the prophet had looked for a true successor to the king, in his oracle of the 'Immanuel'.
 - a. In this oracle Isaiah now describes Immanuel and the deliverance he will bring.
2. The passage is, in effect, either a hymn of thanksgiving or a hymn recognizing the accession of Immanuel to rule.
 - a. The territories mentioned in these verses are all northern, and the description is thus of the salvation of the northern kingdom. Nonetheless, Isaiah is also concerned with the south (Judah), for in v. 5 he refers to deliverance coming to "us".
3. References to a "yoke," "bar," and "rod" are references to symbols of oppression by the Assyrian Empire. The true king will deliver his people from misrule.
 - a. The reference to the "day of Midian" is taken from Judges 7.15-25.
 - i. Victory comes from the LORD.

Psalm 27.1, 5-13

1. This psalm is constructed from a hymn of trust and an individual lament, with the verse selections used in this lesson conflating the two sections.
2. The imagery of light used in the psalm reflects that biblical tradition that light may be equated with life and happiness.
 - a. The association of God with life is made in the specific context of trust and reliance upon God.
 - b. The verses omitted in the lesson refer specifically to the Temple.
 - i. The overall imagery is, thus, that the psalmist may trust in God for being in His presence.

1 Corinthians 1.10-18

1. Following his opening greeting to the Christians in Corinth, Paul now focuses on the divisions that exist among them.
2. Christian life must be expressed in true fellowship. The Corinthians are expressing their differences in slogans (*e.g.*, "I belong to Paul"), and this ignores that fellowship must be expressed in unity in vision.
 - a. Paul has received reports of these divisions from "Chloe's people".

- i. These were employees or slaves of a Gentile businesswoman in Ephesus (Acts 16.14). As Ephesians they were likely sensitive to rivalries in another community.
 1. Chloe seems to have had business interests that extended across the sea from Ephesus to Corinth.
3. The language in Paul's rhetorical questions (*e.g.*, "Has Christ been divided?") does not reflect the sense in Greek rhetoric ("Is not Christ divided?"), in which a negative answer is presupposed by the question.
 - a. All the questions contain the article *mē*, the use of which requires a negative answer.
4. God has different standards! (The Cross is folly to those who are perishing.)
 - a. Believers must detach themselves from the standards of fallen humanity.
 - i. This does not mean that some are predestined to salvation and others to damnation.
 - ii. Believers must still choose to embrace the Cross.
 - iii. The status of one as saved or damned can change; it is not predestined (1 Cor. 5.5; 10.12).

Matthew 4.12-23

1. In Matthew's time the old territorial names of Zebulun and Naphtali were no longer used. He uses them here to make a specific reference to Jesus' activity being messianic, as foretold by Isaiah.
 - a. Jesus "made his home" in Capernaum. The Greek verb used, *katoikein*, implies the actual acquisition of a house.
 - i. The fact that Mary Magdalene is so named (Mary of Magdala, a village of Capernaum), implies that she was a wealthy businesswoman who acted as a patron of the disciples.
 1. This has caused some interpreters to believe that Mary provided a house for the disciples in Capernaum.
2. Matthew specifically equates Jesus' ministry with the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.
 - a. The "road by the sea" is the highway from Damascus to the Mediterranean, which runs through Capernaum.
 - i. Capernaum was the major trading center on this road, at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.
 - ii. The territory was more Gentile than Jewish.
 - iii. Jesus thus begins His ministry among all peoples.
 - iv. Matthew is also probably making the point that the Gentiles "sit in darkness" for not knowing the LORD.
3. Jesus both preaches repentance (John the Baptist's message) and His own message that the kingdom of heaven has come near ("is at hand" in the original).
 - a. The advent of the kingdom of heaven reflects the night vision of Daniel (Dan. 7.13-14) in which the "son of man" effects the future, final salvation of mankind.
 - i. Matthew makes clear that Jesus is this final messianic figure through whom salvation is effected.

- ii. Since Christ has come already (in humility and suffering), we have a foretaste of His presence.
- 4. Matthew is concerned with correct expressions of Judaism, and is thus careful to avoid direct references to God. He thus uses “kingdom of heaven” rather than “kingdom of God,” but this circumlocution should not be understood to mean that the kingdom is only in heaven and not on earth.
 - a. Preaching the kingdom is to be a key component in the preaching of the disciples (Matt. 10.7).