

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (A)

Isaiah 58.1-12

Psalm 112.1-10

1 Corinthians 2.1-16

Matthew 5.13-20

**Isaiah 58.1-12**

1. This speech begins like a prophetic judgment (*cf.* Amos 4.6-12; Isa. 1.2-3), but does not conclude with a verdict of guilt. Instead, there is an announcement of salvation (vv. 8-12).
  - a. The speech follows a pattern of formal summons (v. 1), indictment (vv. 2-4a), a verdict of probation (v. 4b), another indictment (v. 5), followed by a warning (vv. 6-7).
    - i. The speech centers on the practice of fasting as an example of a much broader principle, that whatever the people do must be part of God's purpose and not their own.
2. Throughout, there is a double entendre (particularly evident in Hebrew) between the people's "delight" in external ritual and the LORD's "delight" in the demonstration of compassion for the poor.
3. In vv. 8-14 the focus shifts to an announcement of salvation.
  - a. Verbal parallels with the prior verses are many, indicating that the turn to a new day began within sinful hearts, *i.e.*, that an awareness of sinfulness is the necessary beginning to turning to God.
4. When fasting has produced in the rich a poverty of spirit that allows them to share in the attitude of the poor—of waiting humbly upon God—then God will answer this sharing in humility with His own glory, His own blessings (vv. 10-11).

**Psalm 112.1-10**

1. In Hebrew this psalm is an acrostic poem, which (like Ps. 1) begins with "happy" and ends with "perish".
  - a. In Hebrew, the vocabulary used in the acrostic is very similar to Ps. 111.
2. The opening beatitude *re.* the happiness of the wise person is a common theme in Wisdom literature.
  - a. Parallel themes to those found in this psalm may be found at Prov. 54.9 and 118.7.

**1 Corinthians 2.1-16**

- 1) In v. 1 in this translation, Paul refers to the "mystery" (*mystērion*) of God. Equally well-attested in ancient manuscripts, and more probable in the flow of Paul's argument is *martyrion*, "testimony".
  - a) Paul is referring to the fact that his apostleship is to reveal God's will.
    - i) God is not obscure. He reveals Himself and His will, but only to those who are taught by the Spirit.

- (1) To those who refuse the Spirit, God's testimony (the Cross) is foolish. (*See 1 Cor. 1.18.*)
- 2) Paul contrasts human learning with God's revelation. His own comportment (which is not that of an itinerant philosopher earning a good living among the credulous) testifies to this.
- 3) Paul is using the language of his opponents in his own argument. They had argued from a Hellenistic perspective of human wisdom, in which believers could become "mature" and "perfect," giving them the right to look down upon other believers.
  - a) There are no distinction between believers (2.6, *compared to 3.1*) based on knowledge reserved to a "chosen few".
    - i) Paul is refuting an early form of Gnosticism, in which some may be more "perfect" on the basis of hidden knowledge.
      - (1) The reference to "mystery" in the translation is, therefore, quite unfortunate.
- 4) Just as in any human being there are matters known only to the individual about his own self-consciousness, only God's Spirit can reveal the profundity of God.
  - a) The believer must be open to the Spirit's guidance in order to receive the testimony of God's will.

### **Matthew 5.13.-20**

- 1) Having taught the Beatitudes, Jesus now shifts in His "Sermon on the Mount" to His revelation of a new ethic, including its basic principles.
  - a) Believers are called to a higher righteousness.
    - i) Jesus uses the rhetorical technique of "hyperthesis" at v. 17, to reiterate that the Law itself is holy, and believers are called to holiness.
- 2) Believers have a vocation to the world, to testify as believers ("salt and light").
  - a) The disciple lives not only for himself, but for others. This is the mark of living for God.
- 3) When Jesus refers to "the Law and the prophets" He is referring to the whole of God's revelation in Scripture as it was then known.
  - a) In other words, Jesus is not referring to the "Law" in terms of Mosaic law strictly, but in terms of how God reveals Himself in Scripture.
    - i) Believers are to excel in righteousness not through the "works of the law" but through living God's word.
      - (1) Those who teach otherwise, *i.e.*, to break the commandments, are "least in the kingdom of heaven".
        - (a) *Compare* this warning to that found at Mtt. 18.6; Mark 9.42; Luke 17.2.
          - (i) Teachers and preachers have a "double indemnity" of liability! Those who teach that God's commandments are not eternal do so at the gravest of risks.