

PALM SUNDAY—LITURGY OF THE WORD - Wednesday, March 27, 2024

now

A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church Year B

Wilda C. Gafney, Church Publishing Incorporated. Kindle Edition

Isaiah 49

⁵ And now says the AUTHOR OF LIFE, who formed me in the womb to be God's slave to return Jacob back to God, and that Israel might be gathered to God; I am honored in the sight of the HOLY ONE OF OLD, and my God is my strength.

⁶ God says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my slave to raise up the tribes of Jacob [the line of Rebekah], and to restore the survivors of Israel [born of Rachel and Leah, and Bilhah and Zilpah]? I will give you as a light to the nations, for it will be that my salvation reaches to the end of the earth."

⁷ Thus says the FAITHFUL ONE, the Redeemer of Israel, God's holy one, to one despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Queens and kings shall see and arise, princes and princesses, and they too shall prostrate themselves, on account of the FIRE OF SINAI, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

⁸ Thus says the MIGHTY GOD: In a favorable time have I answered you, on a day of salvation have I helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate portions;

⁹ saying to the prisoners, "Go free!" to those who are in darkness, "Let yourselves be seen." Along the paths they shall pasture, and on all the bare heights shall be their pasture.

¹⁰ They shall not hunger nor shall they thirst, neither shall heat nor sun strike them down, for the one who mother-loves them shall lead them, and by springs of water shall guide them.

¹¹ And I will turn all my mountains into a pathway, and my highways shall be raised up.

¹² Look! These shall come from far away, and see! These from the north and from the sea to the west, and these from the southland of Syene.

¹³ Sing for joy, you heavens, and exult O earth; let mountains break forth into singing! For the TENDER LOVING ONE has comforted God's people, and will mother-love God's suffering ones.

¹⁴ But Zion said, "The EVERLASTING GOD has forsaken me, my Sovereign has forgotten me."

¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child, or mother-love for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I, no, I will not forget you.

¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

Psalm 22

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from my deliverance, from the words of my groaning?

² My God, I cry by day, and you do not answer; and by night, and there is no rest for me.

³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our mothers and fathers trusted; they trusted, and you rescued them.

⁵ To you they cried, and were freed; in you they trusted, and they were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by humankind, and despised by people.

⁷ All who see me mock me; they flap their lips at me, they shake their heads:

⁸ "Commit yourself to the SAVING ONE; let God rescue and deliver the one in whom God delights!"

⁹ Yet it was you who drew me from the womb; keeping me safe on my mother's breast.

¹⁰ On you was I cast from birth, and since my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help.

Mark 14

³² Jesus and his disciples went to a place called Gethsemane and he said to his disciples, “You all sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John and began to be deeply moved and distressed. ³⁴ And said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; you all stay here, and stay awake.” ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you do.” ³⁷ Jesus came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not stay awake one hour? ³⁸ Stay awake and pray that you all may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same thing. ⁴⁰ And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ Jesus came a third time and said to them, “Are you all sleeping, still, and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come. Look! The Son of Woman is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

⁴³ And instantly, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests, the religious scholars, and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I kiss is he; seize him and lead him away safely.” ⁴⁵ Then when Judas came, he went up to Jesus immediately and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and took him. ⁴⁷ But one of the bystanders drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to them, “Is it as for a bandit you all have come out with swords and clubs to seize me? ⁴⁹ Daily I was with you all in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ All of them deserted him and fled. ⁵¹ A certain young man was following Jesus, with just a fine cloth on his naked flesh. They caught hold of him, ⁵² but he forsook the fine cloth and ran off naked.]

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest; and they assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the religious scholars. ⁵⁴ Now Peter followed him from afar into the courtyard of the high priest and was sitting with the attendants, warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death but found none. ⁵⁶ For many gave false testimony against him, yet their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷ Some rose and gave false testimony against him, saying, ⁵⁸ “Well, we heard him say, ‘I will destroy this hand-made temple, and in three days I will build another, that is not hand-made.’” ⁵⁹ But even on this point their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and said to Jesus, “No response? What are they testifying against you?” ⁶¹ But he was silent and answered nothing. Again, the high priest spoke to him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” ⁶² Jesus said, “I am; and

‘you will see the Son of Woman
seated at the right hand of the Power,
and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴ You all have heard his blasphemy! How does it appear to you?” All of them condemned him, “Guilty! This is death!” ⁶⁵ Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” Then the attendants took him and beat him.

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the high priest’s enslaved girls came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus.” ⁶⁸ But Peter denied it, saying, “I do not know or even understand what you are saying.” Then

he went out into the front courtyard. Then the cock crowed. ⁶⁹ And the enslaved girl, on seeing him, began to say to the bystanders again that this man is one of them. ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders said to Peter again, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” ⁷¹ But he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this person you are talking about.” ⁷² And suddenly the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered the thing Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he threw himself down and sobbed.

Mark 15

¹ As soon as it was morning, the chief priests took a counsel with the elders and religious scholars and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Judeans?” He answered him, saying, “You say so.” ³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ But Pilate asked him again, “Have you no reply? See how many charges they bring against you.” ⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, thus Pilate was amazed. ⁶ Now at the festival Pilate used to release one prisoner to them, whoever they asked. ⁷ Now there was a man called Barabbas in prison with the rebels who in the rebellion had committed murder. ⁸ So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹ Then he responded to them, saying, “Do you all want me to release the King of the Judeans to you?” ¹⁰ For he recognized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹ Then the chief priests stirred up the crowd that instead Barabbas might be released for them. ¹² Pilate again responded to them, “What then do you wish me to do with the one you call the King of the Judeans?” ¹³ They shouted more [than before], “Crucify him!” ¹⁴ Pilate asked them, “Why, for doing what evil?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵ So Pilate, wanting to satiate the crowd, released Barabbas to them; then he handed Jesus over for flogging and to be crucified.

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the property, which is the military headquarters, and they called together the entire cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in purple, and they put on him thorns woven into a crown. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Judeans!” ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple and put his clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

²¹ They compelled a passerby, a certain Simon of Cyrene who was coming from the countryside, to carry his cross; he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²² Then they brought Jesus to the Golgotha place (which means Skull Place). ²³ And they offered him myrrh wine, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes, casting lots among themselves for what each would take.

²⁵ It was the third hour [past dawn] when they crucified him. ²⁶ The writing above of the accusation against him read, “The King of the Judeans.” ²⁷ And with him they crucified two revolutionaries, one on his right and one on his left.

²⁹ The passersby reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, “Ha! You would destroy the temple and build it in three days—³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, with the religious scholars, mocked him among themselves and said, “He saved others; himself he is unable to save. ³² The Messiah, the King of Israel! Come down from the cross now that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also demeaned him.

³³ Now when it was the sixth hour [of the day, or noon], darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour [of the day, about three in the afternoon].

³⁴ At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it,

they said, “Listen, he is calling Elijah.”³⁶ And someone ran and filled a sponge with vinegary wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.”³⁷ Then Jesus gave a great cry and breathed out a final time.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.³⁹ Now when the centurion, stationed facing him, saw that in this way Jesus breathed out at the end, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

⁴⁰ There were also women watching from a distance; among them were Mary the Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.⁴¹ These women followed him and ministered to him when he was in Galilee, and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² When evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation—the day before the sabbath—⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who himself was also waiting for the reign of God, went boldly to Pilate and requested for the body of Jesus.⁴⁴ Then Pilate wondered that Jesus was now dead, and summoning the centurion asked him whether he had been dead for some time.⁴⁵ When he learned it from the centurion, he gave the corpse to Joseph.⁴⁶ Then Joseph bought a fine cloth, and taking him down, wrapped him in the fine cloth, and put him in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

⁴⁷ Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was put.

Text Notes

The same word is used in Isaiah 49:5 and verse 7, yet NRSV, JPS, and CEB all translate Israel as God’s “servant” but the nation as the “slave of rulers.” “Servant” occludes the expectation of complete domination/submission, including ability to maim, kill, breed, rape, impregnate, and sell the person without consequence.

Hebrew plurals like “monarchs/kings” and “princes” in Isaiah 49:7 are inclusive. I have expanded both to reflect the presence of female royals in and at the head of some nations. “Go free” in verse 9 uses the primary verb of the exodus. Syene, or Sinim, in verse 12 is an Egyptian town with a record of some Israelite settlement. In Isaiah 49:5 and 15 “womb” is the more generic “belly” used broadly for women and men; it is also found in Psalm 22:9–10 (verse 10 also uses the more common specific “womb”).

In Isaiah 49:13–15 it is paired with “mother-love” (the verb whose root is that same word), and children, including one at the breast, in verse 15. Translating this as “compassion” (NRSV), “pity” (CEB), or just “love” (JPS) eviscerates the intentionally crafted portrait of God as a mother, accomplished despite use of masculine forms.

The second phrase in Psalm 22:3 can also be translated as “you are holy, enthroned, the Praise of Israel.” In verse 9 the Divine Midwife “extracts” the baby; she does not just “catch” him, perhaps suggesting a difficult birth.

One of the verbs that describes Jesus’s emotions in Mark 14:33 is only used in that place, making it difficult to define; suggestions range from “amazed” to “gloomy” to “distressed” to “troubled.” In verse 34, Jesus expresses his sorrow using the language of Psalms 42:11 and 43:5 in Greek: “my soul is cast down.” Similarly, the description of soldiers gambling for Jesus’s clothes matches the wording of Psalm 22:18 in Greek. Judas is concerned that Jesus’s arrest be done “safely” in verse 44; he is a complex character with mixed motives. The “attendants” in verse 54 can provide a number of services; the word is more “assistant” than “guard,” as is commonly translated. The enslaved “girls” in Mark 14:66–69 could be young women. “Girl” is often used to denote their minor legal status. The criminals crucified with Jesus in Mark 15:27 could have been thieves or highway bandits; the root of *lēstēs* is stolen goods. However, the semantic range includes revolutionaries and insurrectionists. This latter understanding may be what is meant given mention of imprisoned rebels (using a different word, *stasiastēs*) in verse 7. The vinegary wine in verse 36 draws on Psalm 69:21. The nature of the women’s ministry to Jesus in 15:41 should be understood as wholistic: spiritual and material. Many Greek manuscripts use the more explicit *ptōma*, “corpse,” rather than *soma*, “body,” for Jesus’s remains in Mark 15:44.

Verse 28 is missing from most translations as its origin hails from less well-regarded manuscripts.