

Second Sunday After the Epiphany
Cycle C RCL

Isaiah 62:1-5

The last collection of oracles in the book of Isaiah, the so-called “Third Isaiah” (Isaiah 56–66), derives from the period after Cyrus’ decree (538 BCE) that allowed the Jews of Babylon to return to their own land. The present oracle, however, is more like the prophecies of the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55) that idealized the return to Zion before the edict and was probably included by the later editor for completeness. The figure of the marriage of God to the restored Zion (62:5) may remind the reader of the figure of God as the bridegroom of Israel in Hosea 2:19 *et pass* and in Jeremiah 2:2 *et pass*. The figures, however, do not fully correspond. The bride in Isaiah 62:5 is Zion, a feminine noun, whereas the “wife” in Hosea and “bride” in Jeremiah is Israel, a masculine noun. The emphasis is upon the happiness of a new marriage, not the restoration of a faithless spouse.

Psalm 36:5-10

This psalm is a *hymn* and most likely a single psalm instead of a combination of two or more psalms. Although the wording of verses 1-4 employ wisdom language to describe the wicked and the complaints of verses 11-12 are like those of the laments, the composition has at its centerpiece the words of today’s readings that extol God for faithfulness and protection. Understandably, the German researcher Gerstenberger called the entire psalm a *lament*, based on the petition in verse 11; but the structure of a lament is missing in Psalm 36. Because of its wisdom language, there has been a tendency of some researchers to view this psalm as post-exilic, but this conclusion is far from sure.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Paul tried to convince his readers in Corinth that the presence of various spiritual gifts as speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, and prophecy among them was not an occasion for individual boasting and conferred no spiritual superiority upon those who possessed them. The greatest problems in the Church of Corinth derived from the belief that true Christianity created a spiritual elite, people who had already been saved and made immortal and thereby made free from the demands and necessities of human existence. Paul’s strong insistence upon the importance of unity in the Christian community has reminded some researchers of the importance of *yaxad* (Hebrew: “unity”) within the sect of Dead Sea Covenanters at Qumran.

John 2:1-11

Robert Fortna aptly called John 1:19-12:50 “The Book of Signs” and considered it to be a separate written source for the Fourth Gospel. The miracle of turning water into wine during the marriage feast at Cana is the first sign, and the raising of Lazarus (John 11) is the last and greatest sign. The Prologue to the Gospel (John 1:1-18) proclaimed that Jesus, as the eternal Word (*logos*) of God, was the creator and owner of all things. The “signs” show his authority and power, in this case his power over the natural world. In the Jewish practice of the first century, marriage was not a religious ceremony but was, rather, a feast that celebrated the bride’s moving from her father’s house to that of her husband. Often such feasts were very elaborate and continued for several days, depending on the wealth and the status of the bridegroom. Cana was a small Jewish city some 12 miles due west of the Sea of Galilee.