

Proper 15
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Genesis 45:1-15

The Elohist account (E) of Joseph's revelation of his identity to his brothers continues E's practice of showing God's action in history through the success of unworthy people who, nevertheless, are progenitors of the children of Israel. We see this clearly in the stories of Jacob's defrauding Esau of his birthright and his deception of his father in Genesis 25-27. Now the arrogant behavior of Joseph toward his brothers as a lad and their selling of him into slavery have come full circle, but all existed with God's purview. As Joseph says, God sent him to Egypt to "make/preserve life" (45:5, 7).

Psalm 133

This short psalm is difficult to fit into any of the usual categories. The venerable Hermann Gunkel considered Psalm 133 a wisdom psalm, but this is possible only if one ignores or explains away verse 3. So Gunkel accepted A. Jirku's suggestion that we should read "Ijon," located at the foot of Mt. Hermon, instead of "Zion." For the reading "Ijon," however, there is not a shred of positive evidence. Perhaps Psalm 133 was part of a pilgrimage psalm, as its ancient title suggests. In any event, the various metaphors of the psalm all serve to support the single image of the blessed assembly of "brothers also in unity," as 133:1 asserts. Gathered for festival, the people of the covenant will find on the hills of Zion a divine relief from the ancient disputes that once divided them.

OR

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

The so-called "Third Isaiah" (Isaiah 56-66) addressed the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon under Cyrus II ("Cyrus the Great," 539-530 BC). This prophet returned to oracles of warning like those of the "First Isaiah" (Isaiah 1-39) but also continued and expanded the international and cosmic themes of the "Second Isaiah" (Isaiah 40-55). Eunuchs (56:3b), who in the time of the First Temple were prohibited from entering the Temple complex (see Deuteronomy 23:1-3), will now be welcome there as will foreigners if both categories keep the law of the Sabbath. The Temple will become the center of the whole world's worship.

Psalm 67

Psalm 67:1-3 is a reflection of the ancient benediction of Aaron (Numbers 6:26). Verse 6 suggests that the occasion for the *hymn* is a liturgy at the time of harvest. The exact kind of liturgy, however, has been in dispute and so H.-J. Kraus' claim that the "prayer psalm for blessing" and not a hymn at all has some merit

Romans 11:1, 29-32

The Mishnah assures the reader that “All Israel has a share in the world to come,” (*m. Sanhedrin* 11:1), and Paul the Pharisee understood that no formulation of the Christian faith could exclude all Israel from participation in the kingdom of God. To support his belief, the apostle to the Gentiles has built an elaborate proof in 11:2b-28; but in the short verses of today's reading, we only see both the emotional intensity of his connection to his own people and his rock-ribbed assurance that God's promises to Israel will always remain valid.

Matthew 15:(10-20) 21-28

(15:10-20) Jesus stood in good company with Rabbis of a later time by arguing that unwashed hands cannot render a person unclean. While the Talmud (for example, *t. b. Chagigah* 24b) agrees that unwashed hands may render holy things common or one unwashed hand may render the other unclean, eating ordinary foods with unwashed hands is treated as sometimes unavoidable. Matthew has derived this story from Mark 7:1-25) but omits the inaccuracies of Mark 7:4 that make Jewish law seem like a matter of meaningless rule-keeping. In Matthew, Jesus argues that the Pharisees don't know their own tradition. They should know that ingesting food from unclean hands could never defile a person. He then challenges the Pharisees to resolve in their own tradition, a dispute about the extent to which a child's wealth might be declared *qorban*, i. e. declared to be an offering dedicated to the temple, an offering that would deprive father and mother, no matter how needy, from profiting from it. We have here an early form of “planned giving,” evidently one of which Jesus disapproves.

15:21-28. This story comes from Mark 7:24-30 and contains the familiar figure of the wise woman who is able even to confound kings. See, for instance, Exodus 1:15-19, where the Hebrew midwives outwit the pharaoh; and 2 Samuel 14:1-20, where the wise woman of Tekoa convinces King David to restore Absalom. It may surprise the reader that a woman can deal “wisely” with Jesus, but that dissonance in the reader's mind serves to underscore the fact that the Gospel is for others outside Israel despite Jesus' protestations that he has come only to preach to Israel (15:24, 26). This encounter anticipates Jesus' final charge to his students to carry his message into the entire world (28:19) and not just to Israel.

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