

Proper 23
Year C

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

This letter derives from what commentators still call “Source B” of Jeremiah, once accepted as the report of Jeremiah's scribe Baruch about the prophet's preaching and other activities. In 597 BCE King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem for the first time, taking wealthy and influential citizens back to Babylon. The letter in 29:1-24 deals specifically with the temptation King Zedekiah had to revolt against the Babylonians and the expectation of the exiles for an early return from Babylon to Jerusalem. This was a false hope, Jeremiah averred. The exiles should settle down in Babylon, build houses, marry, and pray for the welfare of the city (verses 4-7). Chapter 29 in the Hebrew text is chapter 36 in the Greek version called the Septuagint (abbr: LXX). Further, in the LXX verses 16-20 of the Hebrew chapter are not present.

Psalms 66:1-11

Psalms 66 is a composite psalm. Our text, verses 1-11, comprises a *hymn*, and verses 12-18 are an *individual thanksgiving*. Although hymns normally praise God for God's cosmic power or power over nature, a minority of hymns, including this one, celebrate God's saving deeds in Israel's history. Thanksgivings are prayers offered when God has answered the lament of a worshiper by helping the worshiper out of distress. In the present case the psalmist says that he is now paying the vow he made on the occasion of his lament (verse 12). In addition to offering the promised burnt offerings (verse 12), the psalmist now calls the congregation to hear how God answered him in the midst of trouble (verses 14-18). Such a confession enhances God's public reputation (“name”) as one who saves those who serve him.

OR

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

The Deuteronomistic Historian (abbreviation: Dtr) consistently portrays prophets as much more than bearers of a divine message. They are also shamans, endowed with great powers over the natural world and disease. The word “leprosy” in the Bible refers to almost any kind of skin disease; but persons with such diseases were often isolated from the general population for fear of transmission, and so fear of contracting leprosy was widespread and deep among peoples of the ancient East. The cure of Naaman not only proves to this foreigner that Elisha is a true prophet but, more importantly, that the God of Israel is powerful and able to defeat even Naaman's awful disease.

Psalms 111

After the opening Hallelujah, this Psalm is an *acrostic*, *i. e.* the first verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*alef*), and each verse thereafter begins with a succeeding letter of the alphabet. This aids in memorization but is somewhat limiting as a poetic device. Formally a *hymn*, this psalm is unusual among the hymns in containing specific thanksgivings for the good things God has done for Israel instead of for God's cosmic majesty and deeds. This suggests a different function in the Temple liturgy from that of other hymns.

2 Timothy 2:8-15

The author encourages his supposed reader Timothy to endure in times of trial and persevere in

the hard work of passing on the tradition to new teachers (2:1-7). The author now puts himself forward as Timothy's example. The writer has suffered much hardship and implies that Timothy should do the same for the sake of the "elect" (*elektōys*). The poem in verses 11b-13 may have been a hymn of the community but could also have been a composition of the writer. The writer's commandment not to engage the Gnostic Christians in wrangling over theology is for the sake of the very ones who are in the wrong (2:14). Timothy needs only to worry about doing his own task well, not mincing words with people not yet ready for the good news (2:15)

Luke 17:11-19

This is the second of two surprising sayings about faith. In 17:5-10, faith is defined in terms of self-effacing service of God. In this passage such faith is shown in the ordinary human activity of the leper's act of gratitude to Jesus. Faith as this author presents it is a matter of loyal service and profound gratitude. The text also takes this opportunity to stress the theme of Luke and Acts that those who demonstrate the greatest faith may often be found outside the confines of Israel.

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