

Proper 3 (Eighth Sunday After the Epiphany)
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Isaiah 49:8-16a

This passage continues the idea of the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) that when God restores Israel to the land, the land itself will undergo topographical changes (verse 11). Here the strong assurance of God's salvation leads the prophet to style the promise of a covenant as an accomplished fact (verse 8). The previous lectionary continued the pericope through verse 18, making it crystal clear that the Lord had engraved (a map of?) Zion on the Lord's own palms (49:16a) so that the Lord could defend her against all invaders (49:17-18).

Psalm 131

We did not find Psalm 131 in our previous (1979) Eucharistic lectionary. The pioneering scholar of the psalms, Hermann Gunkel, minimized the importance of this psalm by calling it a "motif" that derived from an otherwise unknown *lament*. He named the "motif" with the dismissive German word *Stoßseufzer*, a "sigh" that would assure God of the psalmist's modest aims. The assurance that the psalmist does not engage in speculation that might be offensive to the Lord contrasts with Job's confession in Job 42:3 that he had engaged in speculation that had substituted his own thought for the judgment of the Lord. Thus the "sigh" may be very important in context.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Paul continues in the diatribe style to ridicule his opponents who claim to be strong in the Spirit. If they are strong, then Paul is glad to be weak. Such pride as that of his opponents has divided the Corinthian church into competing interests, and Paul expresses the conviction that this situation is the very antithesis of the Gospel he preaches. Paul's own sufferings for the sake of the Gospel may indeed mark him as a fool in the eyes of his opponents, but he is content to let God, not his opponents, judge his faithfulness.

Matthew 6:24-34

These sayings, also found in Luke 12:22-32, come from the so-called "Q" document the authors of the First and Third Gospels shared in composing their works. This radical dependence on God's providence has always undergirded Jewish thought but we see it especially in the Sabbatical and Jubilee regulations of Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25, both of which require that Israel live for a time only from the food that grows naturally upon the land. In the time of Jesus, many Jews believed that the advent of the Messiah would occur during a last great Jubilee, and early Christians appear to have shared this view. Complete dependence on God to provide food and clothing, therefore, would be an appropriate expression of such Sabbatical/Jubilee expectation.