

Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany
Cycle C RCL

Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13)

This is Isaiah's inaugural vision, set by the editor of the First Isaiah (Isaiah 1-39) in the year 742 BCE. It presents the prophet as performing the duties of the high priest on the Day of Atonement by standing before the presence of the Lord in the Holy of Holies. Some commentators believe the Trisagion ("Holy, holy, holy, ...," verse 3b), Isaiah's protest of unworthiness (verse 5), and the touching of his lips with a live coal (verses 6-7) are parts of the ancient Day of Atonement liturgy. The "us" in verse 8 for whom Isaiah should speak refers to the entire heavenly host and not just to God.

Psalm 138

Although Laments are the most frequent form of psalm in our Psalter, the thanksgivings such as Psalm 138, which are based on the laments, are quite infrequent. Characteristic of a thanksgiving is that it picks up and repeats some of the original lament which the psalmist prayed to entice God (successfully) to relieve the psalmist's distress. We do not, however, see that feature in Psalm 138. Laments promise that the singer will tell of God's faithfulness and salvation to the congregation. Singing thanksgivings like today's psalm in the Temple was the way the psalmist kept that promise. Thanksgivings always contain specific reference to God's positive answer to the singer's plea, and we find that feature in verse 4.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

This is the earliest account of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament. The formula in verse 3, "I handed on to you ... what I in turn received," refers to handing on something by oral tradition, and this has led some scholars to believe that the account goes back to the earliest preaching of the church. The importance of the tradition in Paul's argument with the Corinthians is that they cannot believe in the resurrection of Jesus and deny the reality of resurrection for themselves. (See verse 12.) The story of Jesus' appearance to "more than five hundred" (verse 6) is otherwise unknown to us.

Luke 5:1-11

The author has compiled this story from Mark 4:1-2 and 1:16-20. The unique element is Jesus' ability to direct Simon to a good catch of fish, a story that is remarkably similar to the resurrection story in John 21:4-8. This practical wisdom about fishing serves the function of validating the whole of Jesus' teaching to the crowd. Simon and his comrades accepted the invitation of Jesus to be his students after Jesus has made it clear that their studies will serve the practical end of bringing many into the kingdom of God.

© Fred L. Horton. All rights reserved.