

Proper 13  
Cycle C RCL

Hosea 11:1-11

Although the Gospel of Matthew 2:15 quotes Hosea 11:1 in Greek as a prophecy of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt, the reference is not messianic in Hosea. The prophet does not yet know of the destruction of the nation of Israel in 722 BCE and so conflates the Exodus wandering with the worship of the local Baals in Israel. The same move occurs in the reference to Admah and Zeboiim (11:8). These cities are associated with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Along with Sodom and Gomorrah, they mark the southeastern boundary of the Canaanite lands according to Genesis 10:19. In Genesis 14:2, 8 these two cities, along with Sodom and Gomorrah, were defeated by Chedorlaomer but avenged by Abram. Although they are not mentioned in Genesis 19 where we find the story of the divine destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim are included in that event in Deuteronomy 29:23. Hosea envisions Israel's destruction to be like the fire and brimstone that fell upon Sodom and Gomorra, Admah and Zeboiim. The prophet foresees that Israel will go into exile, but imagines that Israel's exile will be to Assyria and Egypt from which the LORD will return them to their homes in Israel.

Psalm 107:1-9, 43

This is a liturgy of thanksgiving that must be classified with the *community thanksgivings*. Four different situations of distress are recounted: 4-5, 10-12, 17-18, 23-27. This psalm goes far beyond a single person's experience of deliverance. In this psalm the entire nation gives thanks. Some commentators have found verse 3 to refer to the Exile and would date this psalm to the 5th century and the restored Temple of Nehemiah.

OR

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

The author of Ecclesiastes calls himself both *Qohelet* ("the Preacher" but this meaning is debated) and "son of David" (Ecclesiastes 1:1), an appellation that led to the misidentification of the author with King Solomon, the patron of wisdom in Ancient Israel. The book deals with the issue of the possibility of human knowledge of the divine and the application of that knowledge to daily life. The author, in fact, rejects the possibility of knowing God's will and counsels readers to be content with the rewards of daily life and labor without involving themselves overmuch with religious matters. Even so, the laborer must not suffer any delusion about the results of labor. All labor is vexation and vanity, and its ultimate reward passes on to a generation that did not work for it. Some commentators date Ecclesiastes to the Persian period or even the Greek period; and a second-century BCE fragment of the book from Qumran has been held by a few to derive from a time very close to that of the composition of the book.

Psalm 49:1-11

This is a *wisdom psalm* that shares some of the questions about the value of human labor raised in Ecclesiastes. (See above.) Both wise man and fool share the same fate of death. In the case of both groups "Mortals cannot abide in their pomp" (verses 12, 20; verses 11, 20 in *BCP*). Since the same fate awaits all human beings, the author has no particular reason to fear the onslaught of enemies. The entire *wisdom psalm* is an exercise in the same kind of negative speculation about the justice of God's world that we find in Ecclesiastes and the poetry of Job.

### Colossians 3:5-11

The author uses two traditional lists of vices (vs. 5) and virtues (vs. 13) and in our reading assigns the readers a positive role in combating the vices. This moral stance has led some interpreters to find a writer other than St. Paul here. For our writer it matters very much how the readers choose to live. They are able, if they wish, to strip themselves of these practices which are bringing the wrath of God to bear upon the world, a position at odds with the undisputed works of Paul. There are general connections between this passage and Romans 1:18-3:8, but it is by no means clear that our writer would agree with Paul that all human beings have sinned and must depend upon Christ's atonement for their salvation rather than upon their own efforts to realize that atonement by their resistance to sin.

### Luke 12:13-21

This discussion and the parable it contains are both unique to Luke and take up the theme of the uselessness of human labor also discussed in the reading from Ecclesiastes and in Psalm 49. (See above.) The man who decided to enlarge his barns to accommodate his unexpectedly rich harvest received no benefit from his plan because he died the very night he conceived the plan (Luke 12:20). Luke turns this critique of human labor into a general attack on greed and worldly possessions, a persistent theme of the Gospel. Jesus' parables, however, do not have the function of giving religious or moral advice. The rich man does nothing dishonest, and makes reasonable plans for the disposition of his large harvest; and his death is not a punishment for his sins. Even his personal satisfaction, expressed to his soul in 12:19 exhibits only those sentiments we might expect of such a person. The point is that this moral and far-sighted man in our society is a "fool" (*afron*) in the society of God's kingdom.

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