

Second Sunday of Easter
Cycle C RCL

Acts 5: 27-32

The portico of the Temple in Jerusalem was the gathering place for scholars, but the apostles were arrested there the first time because of the crowds they brought there to witness miraculous healing (Acts 5:12-16), not because of their teaching. After the apostles' arrest and miraculous release from prison (5:17-26), the authorities are surprised to find them in the Temple again, this time proclaiming the message of Jesus, and they arrest them for a second time (5:25-26). The author of Luke-Acts appears to have a general grasp of the workings of the Temple, which had ceased to exist decades before he wrote. He correctly depicts the second arrest of the apostles as without violence because of the danger of riot in the Temple precincts, a recurring problem in the large, open Court of the Gentiles where everyone, even non-Jews, might congregate. The author also correctly identifies the Sadducees and not the Pharisees as instigators of the persecution even though the Sadducees were a minority in the Sanhedrin. The political/religious party of the Sadducees was principally the party of wealth and priestly position. Consequently, the smooth running of the Temple was of highest importance for them. The influence of the one Pharisee from whom we do hear in chapter 5, Gamliel I, is conciliatory and convinces the council to avoid bloodshed (5:33-45a).

Psalm 118:14-29

Psalm 118 in Jewish tradition is one of the *Hallel* ("praise") psalms sung before and after the Passover meal. It is an individual *psalm of thanksgiving*. The opening of the temple gates to the psalmist described in 118:19-20 may suggest that the singer has received deliverance not only from mortal illness but also from an illness such as leprosy that had left the psalmist maimed or unclean and hence unqualified to enter the temple precincts. Individual thanksgivings presuppose a personal lament in which the psalmist has promised to declare God's faithfulness and salvation. We see a reference to this prayer in 118:21. Explanations as to who might be greeted in 118:26 have ranged from the messianic king to proselytes. None of these suggestions has much weight. Is the one welcomed the psalmist himself, cleansed of his impurity, and brought into the temple fellowship again with liturgical dance and song?

OR

Psalm 150

The inventory of musical instruments used for the worship of God in the Jerusalem temple suggests a final call on the part of the editor of the Psalms to worship and praise. The curious expression "all the breath" in the last verse is a metonym for all human beings, which the BCP paraphrases as "let everything that has breath." (See Joshua 10:40. Without "the" the expression appears with the same meaning in Deuteronomy 20:16; 1Kings 15:29; Joshua 11:11 and 14.) The psalm's description of the liturgical dance and music in the temple is much like the description of David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Samuel 6:5, an allusion that may be intentional. Although Psalm 150 is the last psalm in the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Bible has 151 psalms and the Syriac (*Peshitta*) has 155, including Psalm 151. A first-century Psalm scroll found in the eleventh cave at Qumran contains Hebrew texts for Psalm 151 and for three of the other four additional psalms of the Peshitta. The same Qumran scroll tells us that David composed 4050 psalms.

Revelation 1:4-8

An otherwise unknown man named John wrote this book while in exile on the island of Patmos for his Christian confession (1:9) during the last years of the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE). Although portions of the book had been framed during the last years of

Emperor Nero's rule (reigned 54-68 CE), John added material that reflected the later situation in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) in the time of Domitian. In the last year or so of Domitian's life local persecutions of Christians broke out in Asia Minor, some of which may have been instigated by Domitian himself. Revelation is an *apocalypse*, *i. e.* it describes the end of time in terms of a prophet's vision from the heavenly world. Although the book contains many disturbing images of the end of the present age, its overall purpose was to comfort and build up the courage of faithful Christians even if such courage led them to martyrdom. The book contains fragments from many early Christian hymns of which 1:7 is an example. The reference to Christ coming on the clouds in that hymn is an allusion to Daniel 7:13.

John 20:19-31

Near the beginning of his last discourse to the disciples, Jesus promised that he would send them a "counselor" or "advocate" (Greek: *paraklētos*, John 14:26). In this passage he fulfills that promise in his first appearance to his students after his resurrection. He transmits this gift by breathing upon them, an act reminiscent of the role of God's Spirit/wind/breath on the waters of chaos in the story of the creation (Genesis 1:2). They will now act in the world with Christ's own authority to forgive sin. Verse 31 was probably the end of the Gospel of John with chapter 21 being an addendum. The prologue of John (John 1:1-18) announced the subject matter of the book, and now this last verse reveals its purpose.