

Proper 12
Cycle B RCL
Revised

2 Samuel 11:1-15

The theme word in this passage is “send” (Hebrew *shalax*), pointing to the relative place of power that one has over another. David sent his general Josiah with his staff and “all Israel” to besiege Rabbah (modern Amman). Indeed, he even *sent* along the Ark of the Covenant, God’s throne, presumably with God sitting upon it, to insure victory. At leisure in Jerusalem, David *sent* slaves to inquire about the woman he saw bathing, and then he *sent* slaves to fetch her for his pleasure. Powerless to resist the king, Bathsheba does get to turn the tables on David somewhat. When she discovers that she is pregnant, Bathsheba *sends* to David to tell him the news, a portent of the role she is to play later in the succession of her son Solomon. David, though, *sent* for Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, to trick him into sleeping with his wife and accepting paternity of the unborn child. When Uriah refused, David *sent* the hapless soldier’s death warrant with him back to his general, Joab. This is not a love story. David raped this woman because he was bored and because he was able to do so. This story shows how the prophecy in 1 Samuel 8:10-18 about the arrogance of the kingship has started to come to pass.

Psalm 14

This *wisdom psalm* is repeated almost word for word in the Second Book of the Psalter (Psalm 53) and is the only psalm to occur twice in the Psalter. The “fool” (*naval*) here is not an atheist but a person who lives his/her life as though there were no God in heaven to execute justice. The psalm may be misread to suggest a belief in original sin, but the references in verses 3-4 is to those who in fact choose to do evil. Verses 5-6 make clear that there are those who do live wisely though under oppression from the wicked: “the company of the righteous (14:5)” and “the afflicted (14:6).” Wisdom psalms are for teaching a faithful and profitable approach to life, the instruction of a parent or of a teacher. Verse 7 shows the editorial work of an exilic psalmist and is later than the rest of the psalm.

OR

2 Kings 4:42-44

This story is clearly a prototype for the feedings of the multitudes in the Gospels, and like those accounts is a miracle story (*Wundergeschichte*), a form designed to show the power of someone to control or channel divine power. This accords with the theme of the Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr) that God works in the world through human agency, even when something miraculous or unexpectedly awesome happens. The miracles of Elijah and Elisha serve to emphasize their roles as men who have a direct relationship to God.

Psalm 145:10-19

This hymn is an alphabetic acrostic, *i. e.* each of its 21 verses commences with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The poetic constraints the acrostic format placed upon the poet may have found compensation for students with knowledge of the alphabet, making the psalm easy to learn; but it is equally likely that people considered the acrostics beautiful in their own right. Our selection includes the verses from the letters *yod* (y) to *resh* (r).

Ephesians 3:14-21

The author now picks up his original line of thought from 3:1. The intervening verses have been a parenthesis in which the author reminds readers that Paul endured suffering to bring to the Gentiles the “secret” of redemption, hidden for these many centuries, but now revealed through Paul’s preaching. Kneeling was not a typical posture of prayer in the Bible, perhaps because kneeling was associated with Baalism. (See 1 Kings 19:18.) The Prayer of Manasseh 11 (Canticle 14 in our *Book of Common Prayer*) has the wicked king “bow the knee of my heart” to God. It is extraordinary to have God called the “Father of nations/families” and to claim that all nations “in the heavens and on the earth” are named by him. This reference to the heavenly families of divine beings in conjunction with human families creates an esoteric element not much seen in Paul’s authentic writings.

John 6:1-21

Jesus’ miraculous deeds are called *signs* in John’s Gospel, and the author believes the signs can help us understand and believe in Jesus. Indeed, at the conclusion to chapter 20, the author tells us that the signs are given in the Gospel so that the reader may know that Jesus is the Christ (John 20:30-31). The story of feeding the five thousand is also in Mark 6:32-44, Matthew 14:13-21, and Luke 9:10-17. There is a parallel tradition of the feeding of four thousand in Mark 8:1-10 and Matthew 15:32-39. All but Luke put the feeding of the five thousand in juxtaposition with Jesus walking on the water. John, however, uses these accounts as a preface to a long discourse about the Bread of Life (22-71).

© Fred L. Horton. All rights reserved.