

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Cycle C RCL
Revised

Joshua 5:9-12

Although the Jordan River was not especially formidable at this location at the top of the Dead Sea, the dividing of the waters here reminds the reader that the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt through the Sea of Reeds ("Red Sea" in the Greek translations) is now admitting them into the land of promise. The symbol of the fulfillment of the promise to Moses is the cessation of the manna. Israel has arrived at its destination.

The name "Gilgal" means "wheel" or "circle" in Hebrew, referring, perhaps, to a circle of stones that formed a cultic center for the town. The name in this case, however, provides the author the opportunity for a play on words: "This day I have 'rolled away' (*galloti*) the reproach of Egypt (5:9)."

Psalms 32

Laments often promise to announce God's salvation or to instruct others in God's way if God answered the psalmist's plea. See, for instance, Psalm 51:14 (Hebrew 51:15; KJV 51:13). The fulfillment of this promise involved the use of a *thanksgiving* psalm such as Psalm 32. In general, a *thanksgiving* summarizes the original lament (32:5) and then proceeds to tell everyone listening of God's faithfulness to those who keep the divine commandments. In this particular case, the lament in question was a lament of guilt, and the psalmist addressed those who, like him, were sinners in need of relief of the sufferings they believed God has brought upon them for their sins.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Paul's opponents in Corinth argued that the Apostle reserved all of the benefits of salvation for the age to come. They, on the other hand, knew a present joy and transformation through their relationship to Jesus Christ. Paul corrects them in this lesson by claiming that anyone who is "in Christ" is indeed a "new creation," but this new creation leads the followers of Christ to make witness to the world not merely to sit back and enjoy the fruits of salvation. The expression "righteousness of God" in verse 21 is usually reserved in the Bible for God's mighty acts in history. Christians are the greatest of these mighty acts, made so by the sin offering of Christ.

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Luke 15:1-3 sets the subsequent parables within the vague context of a visit to Jesus by tax collectors and the "grumbling" of the Pharisees and scribes over Jesus' willingness to eat with them. Luke 15:11-32 is the third parable of the sequence. It is unique to Luke but bears some relationship to the "Hymn of the Pearl" in Gnostic literature where the emphasis is upon the son's realization (*gnosis*) of the need for salvation. In Luke, however, the emphasis falls upon the older brother's jealousy, which some researchers have taken as a figure of the jealousy Jewish Christians might feel for Gentiles who were being saved without ever having submitted to the discipline of the Torah.