

Fifth Sunday in Lent
Cycle C RCL
Revised

Isaiah 43:16-21

This is part of a long speech (14-28) in which the author, speaking for God, imagines that the Jews in captivity in Babylon will undergo a new exodus like the previous exodus from Egypt. The miraculous changes in the Saudi desert through which the Jews will have to travel to reach Jerusalem are those mentioned in the inaugural poem of the so-called "Second Isaiah." See Isaiah 40:3-4. Now that Israel has suffered the rightful punishment for its sins, God will spare no effort to restore the people of God to their land again.

Researchers debate the question as to what it is that vs. 18 indicates Israel should forget. Should Israel forget the salvation of Israel from Egypt or should it forget the times of disobedience that resulted in exile? The reason for this forgetting is the "new thing" (*xadashah*) God is about to do (*i. e.* the return from exile and restoration of Zion), something that is qualitatively greater and more important than anything else in Israel's memory.

Psalms 126

Psalms 120-133 have each received the label "A Song of Ascents" (*shir hama' alot*) and were all *pilgrimage songs* sung by those who were on their way to the Temple for various festivals. Although the psalm gives praise for God's help in the past and prays for a renewal of the nation's fortunes, it does not fall into the category of a *thanksgiving psalm* or of a *lament*.

There is general agreement that vss. 5-6 do not match the rest of the psalm in grammar or vocabulary, but there is a division of opinion as to whether these verses comprise a fragment of a wisdom song or of a prophetic oracle.

The strong contrast between sorrow and rejoicing in the psalm suggest that it belongs to the period following the exile in Babylon.

Philippians 3:4b-14

Paul reserved some of his most strident language to express the contempt in which he held this present age. He regards all things as *skubala* (accusative of *skubalon*, a Greek word for human refuse) in comparison with the value of knowing Christ (3:8). The sudden shift from praise of Epaphroditus (2:25-3:1) to warning about the "dogs" (3:2) who are the Philippians' enemies has suggested to some interpreters that we have more than one letter from Paul and, indeed, that Philippians is a composite of several letters.

John 12:1-8

Oscar Cullmann assigned this passage to his list of passages he believed indicated the dependence of John on the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Indeed, Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:1-9; Luke 7:36-39, and John 12:1-8 share too much in the way of similar wording for their similarities to be accidental. In the Synoptic Gospels, the woman is unknown. In John, she is Mary, the sister of Lazarus. The event occurs in Bethany (modern el-Azzariya, on the SE slope of the Mount of Olives) in Matthew, Mark, and John; but in Matthew and Mark the setting is the house of Simon the Leper.

Matthew, Mark, and John make the anointing a harbinger of Jesus' death and burial, occurring, as it does, just before the final journey into Jerusalem. Luke, on the other hand, uses the scene to have Jesus speak about the forgiveness of sins, not his death and burial. Luke also removes the story from the context of the final journey to Jerusalem and places it much earlier in the Gospel's narrative than in the narratives of the other three.