

Proper 23
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Exodus 32:1-14

Since there is only one calf in the Exodus story, why does Aaron use the plural “gods” to describe it? The answer comes in 1 Kings 12:28b where the upstart king Jeroboam used exactly the same words to dedicate the golden calves at the apostate northern shrines at Bethel and Dan. Since there were two shrines, the words fit Jeroboam’s speech better than they do Aaron’s. The writer has read Jeroboam’s words back into the Exodus story to show that Jeroboam’s apostasy was prefigured at Sinai and that only Judah, its Davidic kingship, and its cult in Jerusalem were legitimate. Neither Aaron nor Jeroboam command Israel to desert the Lord. Indeed, Aaron in Exodus 32:5c intends to use the new cult figure in a feast to the Lord on the following day (32:5c). The NRSV uses the colorless “changed his mind” *vayyinnaxem* in verse 14 to represent God’s change of heart about destroying the Israelites at Sinai. The same verb is usually translated “repent.”

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-21

This is a psalm of a mixed type. The long instructional section of this psalm (verses 7-39) makes it impossible to call the psalm simply a *community lament*, and the Hallelujahs at the beginning and the end suggest that it could be styled as a *hymn*. The strong pleas for mercy both to the psalmist as an individual sinner and to the people as a whole employ the language of laments. Community laments sometimes appeal to God on the basis of God’s forgiveness and favor in Israel’s past as does Psalm 85. Evidently, the psalmist has taken various lessons from scripture and used them as an extended proof that God has historically been merciful. For this reason commentators have assigned this psalm to the period after the Babylonian Exile when the pentateuchal history was available. Psalm 106 closes Book Four of the Psalter.

OR

Isaiah 25:1-9

The latest material in the Book of Isaiah occurs in chapters 24-27 and is sometimes called the “Apocalypse of Isaiah” because these chapters contain themes otherwise found only in apocalyptic writings. One such theme is that of God’s universal kingdom in verses 6-9 of today’s reading. This vision of the great feast of God in a restored Zion is prefaced by a traditional *hymn* (25:1-5) such as might be found in our Book of Psalms.

Psalm 23

This beloved psalm, together with Psalms 11, 16, 62, 125, 129, and 131, belongs to a category of psalms known as *psalms of trust*. All but Psalms 125 and 129 are individual statements, and all present the worshiper’s confidence in the God of Israel to heal and to save. The actual function of the psalms of trust in the liturgy of the Temple is unknown, but they may have functioned in a way similar to the *thanksgiving* psalms, *i. e.* to accompany sacrifices of thanksgiving after deliverance from some evil such as illness.

Philippians 4:1-9

One of the reasons some researchers believe Philippians contains fragments of several letters is that 4:2-9 reads like the conclusion to a letter. Reference to rejoicing in 4:4 picks up a theme that is

repeated in Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 19, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1; 4:10. Joy in suffering stems from the sure knowledge that the afflictions of the righteousness are a sign of the end times. This knowledge results in peace and even joy in the midst of those afflictions. Euodia and Syntyche find no mention elsewhere in the Bible, but Paul's desire for them to reconcile their views reminds us of the powerful and largely unacknowledged role of women in the spread of Christianity. Paul's statement that they have "struggled together with me in the Gospel" (4:3) implies a gender equality that was rare in the religious and secular organizations of the Roman world.

Matthew 22:1-14

Another parable on the theme of the "New Israel." Weddings in ancient Judaism were not religious ceremonies but celebrations, often lasting for several days, of the bride's moving from her father's home to her husband's. One problem in this parable is mention of the "wedding garment" in 22:11. We have no evidence for such thing as a special garment to be worn to weddings in first-century Jewish life. Evidently, the guest incurred the king's wrath because the guest made no special preparation for the feast, thus bringing dishonor upon his host.

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