

Proper 28  
Cycle C, RCL

Isaiah 65:17-25

The return from exile in 538 BCE did not bring the Jews the bliss they expected. Rather, life in Persian-era Jerusalem was difficult and often dangerous. This led to speculation that the grand promises of the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) had been overblown and even misleading. It was easy to lose hope in the entire enterprise of reconstruction. This is the last of three hopeful songs (Isaiah 11:1-9, 10-16; 12:1-6) that end the first set of oracles in Isaiah. Although the prophecies of Isaiah have been largely threatening up to this point, this section provides words of hope that God will ultimately restore the Davidic monarchy and the city of Jerusalem. The passage has some affinities to the thanksgiving psalms but on the whole must be reckoned as a hymn of praise, perhaps one taken directly from the temple's liturgy. The Third Isaiah (56-66) alternates between prophecies of doom if Judah deserts its hope in God and oracles of salvation such as the present lesson, both designed to encourage the struggling citizens of Jerusalem to maintain their trust in God's promises.

Canticle 9 (Isaiah 12:2-6)

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OR

Malachi 4:1-2a

The word "Malachi" means "my messenger" and probably should not be understood as a proper name in 1:1 and 3:1. The book is a collection of anonymous prophetic sayings from the period after the Exile in Babylon. Many wondered why the return from Exile had not produced a time of plenty. The prophetic answer is that Israel had continued to sin. The oracle concludes, however, with the promise that this time only the evildoers, not the entire nation, will be punished for this sin and that the prophet Elijah will return to bring Israel back to its God.

Psalm 98

This *hymn* shares so much of the imagery of the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) that some consider the poem to be to be post-exilic. The focus of the psalm is upon the reestablishment of a righteous judgment not only for Jerusalem but for the entire earth over which Yahweh reigns

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

One of the distinguishing marks of the Pharisees was that their teachers did not accept payment from those they taught. Paul brought over this rule from his Pharisaic past to his new life as a Christian. A member of the Thessalonian church refused to support himself by worldly labor and expected to be supported by his teaching activities. Paul instructed the church to treat the offender to a Jewish form of discipline known as *xerem*, exclusion from the fellowship of the community until the offender has mended his ways.

Luke 21:5-19

The author has taken over Mark 13, sometimes called Mark's "Little Apocalypse" but has modified Mark to remove the implication that the kingdom will come after the Gospel has been preached to the nations (Mark 13:10) or that the persecution of Christians will be a sign of the end of the age (Mark 13:9). Both of these things had already occurred by the time Luke's Gospel was written and the end had not occurred. Luke adds that one of the false teachings of the imposters who come in his name is that the time of the end has arrived (Luke 21:8).

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