

Eighth Sunday After Epiphany
Cycle C RCL

Sirach 27:4-7

Joshua (Jesus) ben Sirach began a wisdom school in Jerusalem around the turn of the second century BCE for the instruction of young men in the Law of Moses. Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, as it is called in the Vulgate, is actually a two-volume work (Volume I = chapters 1-23, Volume II = chapters 24-51), composed around 180 BCE. Some 50 years later, ben Sirach's grandson, who had taken a Hebrew manuscript of his grandfather's work to Egypt, translated it into Greek. In 1896 Solomon Schechter published a document retrieved from Egypt by two British tourists that contained the Hebrew of Sirach 39:15-40:8. By 1905 many long fragments of the Hebrew text had come to light and were available for study. The discovery of the great Psalm Scroll in Qumran Cave 11 provided additional fragmentary texts, the oldest in our possession. Except for Sirach 27:4, the rest of our lection (verses 5-7) is contained in both the Hebrew and the Greek. Rather than emphasizing the danger of speech as do some maxims of the oldest wisdom tradition (Proverbs 10:19; 12:6), the author instructs his young charges in the careful and judicious use of words.

or

Isaiah 55:10-13

These verses mark the end of the oracles attributed to the so-called "Second Isaiah," a prophet or circle of prophets that tried to apply the teaching of Isaiah of Jerusalem (742-701? BCE) to the situation of the Jews in exile in Babylon (597/586-538 BCE). This ending picks up the themes of the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) about the restoration of the promises to David and the imminent exodus of the Jews from Babylon.

Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14

This is a personal *thanksgiving* that borrows heavily in verses 12-14 from the wisdom tradition in which personal righteousness and success in life are closely associated. The general nature of this thanksgiving made it possible at a later time to include it as a community prayer on the Sabbath as suggested in the later superscription. Nevertheless, the personal *lament* for salvation from personal enemies that preceded this prayer is transparent in verses 9-11. In general, thanksgivings were offered in the Temple after a person had prayed a lament, received the requested deliverance, and then returned to the Temple to offer thanksgiving.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

This picture of the resurrection is much like Paul's description of it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, including mention of the Jubilee trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; see Leviticus 25:9). The expression "flesh and blood" (15:50) is Pauline terminology for human existence in the present evil age. To inherit the age to come one must receive a new body and a new being entirely that suits the mode of being in God's kingdom. Instead of envisioning salvation as the translation of an immortal soul into heavens, Paul imagines that the redeemed will put on this new, immortal being as one dons a garment.

Luke 6:39-49

See the parallel to this portion of the Sermon on the Plain in Matthew 7:21-27. The source both Matthew and Luke used is sometimes called "Q," a collection of sayings of Jesus and John the Baptist not represented in Mark's Gospel. The sayings are very much like contemporary Pharisaic teachings especially in their emphasis on right behavior as over against right belief.