

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Cycle C RCL

Acts 11:1-18

The author of Luke-Acts has already narrated Peter's vision and his journey to Caesarea Maritima in the previous chapter (Acts 10:1-33) with the implication that Peter should heed the call from Cornelius and go to the unclean gentiles in Caesarea. Caesarea Maritima is about halfway between modern Tel Aviv and Haifa; and its builder Herod the Great dedicated it as his capital city in 10 BCE. Because Caesarea Maritima was in fact a gentile city, the rabbis declared that it, along with Caesarea Philippi, and Sepphoris, were not part of the land of Israel. The issue is uncleanness, not misbehavior. Even if all the citizens of these cities were upright, they would still be unclean mainly because of the pagan temples. So in Acts 11:1-18 the issue becomes how much uncleanness did Paul contract while witnessing to the gentiles, and Paul redirects his vision account to the question of the city's uncleanness. Further, as a Jew, Paul was more susceptible to uncleanness than his gentile hosts. He could not have failed to have contracted uncleanness while in the capital. Yet before coming to the holy city of Jerusalem there is no indication that Paul undertook any of the ritual acts that have the effect of cleansing one from uncleanness. So that is what the second account vision means in this context: Uncleanness is no barrier to following the call of God to declare the message of salvation.

Psalms 146-150

Psalms 146-150 are all hymns that begin with the formula *hallelu-yah!* (Praise the LORD!). The present psalm envisions a choir that includes the heavenly army, elements of the physical universe, the kings and peoples of the world, and even the great sea-monsters of chaos. The cosmology, like that of the Priestly writer in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, envisions our world as floating within a great chaos of waters. Hence the reference to the waters "above" the heavens in verse 4.

Revelation 21:1-6

his passage is a mixture of allusions to scripture and to other ancient apocalyptic (end-of-the-world) texts. The promise that God will renew both heaven and earth (21:1) is expressed in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, as well as in the ancient non-biblical Book of Jubilees where this renewal becomes a feature of the end times (Jubilees 1:29 and 4:46). Another non-canonical apocalypse, First Enoch, refers to a new heaven that will spring from the midst of the angels in the "tenth week of the world's existence (1 Enoch 91:15-16.)" Third Isaiah gives us an important parallel to the figure of the new Jerusalem as a bride in Revelation 21:2: "And with the rejoicing of a bridegroom over a bride, your God will rejoice over you (Isaiah 62:5)." The figure of God wiping away tears is from Isaiah 25:8 and has already been used in Revelation 7:17 but is found again in 21:6. The "loud voice" (21:3) is the heavenly echo, known to the Rabbis as the *bat qol*, an authoritative voice but not necessarily the voice of God. The voice's utterance has the appearance of being a hymn, likely a familiar composition John incorporated into his text.

John 13:31-35

The Qumran community responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls thought of itself as a unified body (Hebrew: *yaxad*) bound together by love. This would preserve them in the time of trial that would precede the final realization of God's kingdom. This idea is similar to the teaching of Jesus here. His followers too should be unified by love for the difficult time in which he will be absent from them (13:33).

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