

Seventh Sunday After the Epiphany
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Isaiah 43:18-25

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 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.

Psalm 41

This is the last psalm of the First Book of the Psalter and is a *lament*. The psalmist prays for healing and from those who mock him in his suffering. In some sense, the psalmist suffered the worst indignity when his own best friend joined those who scorned him. The argument for why the Lord should heed the psalmist’s prayer includes God’s reputation for sustaining the sick. Should God fail to do so in this case, the enemies of the psalmist would be proved right. The psalm ends with a statement of trust, as do most laments, a subtle argument about how God’s reputation would suffer if God refused the confident psalmist’s request.

2 Corinthians 1:18-22)

The second epistle to Corinth is, in reality, a composite of several different letters Paul exchanged with his wayward congregation while he was in Ephesus on the so-called “Third Missionary Journey.” This portion of 2 Corinthians is actually the latest part of that exchange, written after the matters at issue were largely decided and Paul was ready to come to Corinth to make a collection for the Christians in Jerusalem. The current passage is part of a review of past events and an expression of relief that the way is now clear for Paul to come to Corinth.

Mark 2:1-12

This is a complicated *apophthegm*, *i. e.* a story that illustrates a difficult but important saying of Jesus. The difficult saying is contained in Jesus’ words to the paralytic: “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (2:10).” Forgiveness of sins against God was a function of the temple cultus, not the prerogative of a human being, and so the scribes in attendance understandably regard Jesus’ words as blasphemy (verses 6-7). This shocking utterance serves Mark’s fundamental theme that Jesus has become the locus of God’s forgiving presence and in that sense takes on the saving functions of the temple. This theme culminates in the rending of the temple veil in Mark 15:38.

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