

Proper 14
Cycle B RCL
Revised

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33

The cherry-picked verses of this reading make the story seem only to concern Absalom's death and the king's lamentation over his son. Our lectionary, however, has omitted more here than it has included. Joab's soldiers did not put forth their hands to kill Absalom until Joab himself first stabbed the young man in the heart (18:14). This disobedience to the king's order was a source of consternation to Joab's men, but the text makes clear that Joab wanted the war finished and Absalom dead. Joab dispatched a mercenary, a soldier from Ethiopia, to inform the king, perhaps thinking such a foreigner dispensable in the face of David's wrath. Ahimaaz, the son of David's priest, however, convinced Joab that he [Ahimaaz] too should go to inform the king; and, in fact, Ahimaaz arrived before the Cushite and announced the victory to David, though lying about his knowledge of Absalom's fate, information left to the Cushite to tell. David's weeping over his son's death is a reminder of the overindulgence David practiced toward his sons, a fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy about the growing arrogance of kings.

Psalm 130

Laments attempt to rouse God to action on behalf of a sufferer who may be suffering as an innocent or, as in the present case, may be suffering because of some sin. Our psalmist recognizes his guilt but points out that if God were to punish all wrongdoing, nobody could survive; and God could not, then, keep the divine promises of salvation to Israel. The psalmist confidently expects redemption despite his sin, for otherwise there could be no relationship with God. Often laments promise that the restored psalmist will make God's faithfulness known in the congregation. In this case, however, the lament actually includes (130:7-8) the words the psalmist would use to proclaim God's faithfulness.

OR

1 Kings 19:4-8

Queen Jezebel, the Baal-worshipping queen of Israel, decided to slay Elijah for his destruction of the 400 Baal priests on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:30-19:3), and this threat led the prophet to flee southward, through Judah, into the desert where he "asked his soul to die." This unusual expression reminds one of the Egyptian wisdom text that reports a man's dispute with his soul over the advisability of suicide, but our text does not leave Elijah's desire to die in question. The ministering messenger (*mal'ach*) in verses 5, 7 could be a human being, but the fact that the sustenance he gives the prophet is sufficient for forty days argues that the messenger is a divine being. Mt. "Horeb" is the name of the mountain where Moses received the law according to the Elohist writer (E) and the Deuteronomist (D). The Yahwist (J) uses the name "Sinai."

Psalm 34:1-8

A Judahite would utter this extended *thanksgiving* aloud in the temple, thereby fulfilling a vow made to God when praying for deliverance in a *lament*. The psalm recalls that the psalmist called upon the LORD in the midst of terror (vs. 4) and was delivered from trouble. Laments often include a promise to teach the congregation about God's faithfulness. (See, for instance Psalm 51:13.) This psalm fulfills just such a promise.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

It was commonplace for Greek moral philosophers to warn their hearers of the dangers of all strong passions, especially the passion of anger. The Rabbis too warned their students that to give into anger was to step into the hands of transgression. The writer of Ephesians is most interested in the effect his readers' behavior will have on the unity of the community and so resorts to the usual warnings about the dangers of anger. He goes beyond these warnings, however, and perhaps beyond St. Paul himself, by claiming that surrender to anger is a vice like theft that must be eradicated in the church lest the Holy Spirit be grieved and the Spirit's seal of redemption be lost.

John 6:35, 41-51

The Gospel of John portrays the historical Jesus as the divine *word* (Greek: *logos*) that existed before the creation and yet also lived the life of a human being (John 1:1-2, 14). In this lesson Jesus compares himself to the heavenly bread, the *manna* that came down from heaven to feed the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16, Numbers 11). Unlike the wilderness bread, though, bread, which people ate and yet died later on, Jesus is "living bread" (vs. 51), bread that confers eternal life on those who receive him. Jesus's audience, however, does not understand the comparison (vs. 42), and this lack of understanding leads Jesus to insist that those whom God has chosen *will* understand his instruction and adduces a quotation from Isaiah 54:13 to support this view (vs. 45).

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