

**Proper 17**  
**Cycle B RCL**  
**Revised**

**Song of Solomon 2:8-13**

The Song of Songs is a collection of love poems/songs that considers and celebrates the role of sexual passion in the lives of two very young people. In this segment, the young woman sings about the thrill of her lover's appearance in the spring and about his call to her to come away with him. Although both Jews and Christians have read the Song of Songs in an allegorical or figurative way, there is no evidence that it deals with anything other than the joys, dangers, and disappointments of love.

**Psalm 45:1-2, 7-10**

Psalm 45 is a *royal psalm* that celebrates the marriage of the Davidic king to a foreign princess. It is unusual in several respects, not the least of which is the fact that the location of its performance would not be in the temple but in the royal court since marriage was not a religious ceremony in ancient Judah.

**OR**

**Deuteronomy 4:1-4, 6-9**

By omitting verse 5, the RCL lost the specific illustration of the kind of disobedience against which the author warns. The story of Israel's homage to the Baal of Peor is in Numbers 25:1-4. The setting for that story is Shittim (modern Tell el-Hamman in Jordan?) north of Mt. Nebo and across the River Jordan from Jericho (Numbers 33:48-49). Peor is a mountain in the same general area, which evidently boasted a Baal shrine that the residents of Shittim frequented. When the Israelites came to the region of Shittim, they married local women and adopted the local religion, thereby incurring the wrath of the Lord. The author of Deuteronomy draws attention to this indiscretion, and warns that the Land of Promise will also offer Israel temptations to desert the divine commandments through assimilation with the Canaanite population. The author warns that such disobedience will produce similarly disastrous results.

**Psalm 15**

This is a *pilgrimage psalm* and, in particular, a liturgy for admission to the Temple in Jerusalem that is much like Psalm 24. The priest asked the questions in verse 1 to the pilgrims who sought entrance, and the balance of the psalm constituted their reply. Although priestly law set rigid standards of physical purity for admission to the Temple, the entrance liturgies of the Psalter stress personal righteousness without reference to ritual cleanliness.

**James 1:17-27**

Martin Luther called the Epistle of James an "epistle of straw" because it nowhere contains the Pauline doctrine of salvation by faith and, indeed, even seems to ridicule that idea in some places. The author contends that true faithfulness consists of keeping the "royal law" (2:8) or the "perfect law, the law of liberty" (1:25). Far from encouraging a petty legalism, as Luther feared,

however, the Epistle called its readers to a life of charity and decency as the best expression of their Christianity. Various dates and authors have been suggested for this work, but the end of the first century saw an intense period of pseudonymous letter writing to which the Epistle of James may belong.

**Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

The Pharisees comprised the most popular Jewish sect in Palestine because they made the Law a matter of everyday practice. In addition to the written Law (Hebrew: *torah ketuvah*), the Pharisees believed Moses had received an oral Law (Hebrew: *torah shebe'al peh*), which addressed the matters of everyday life not discussed in the scripture such as ablutions before meals. They believed that it was their duty to reconstruct that oral Law and follow it with the same rigor as they would the written Law. Jesus's position here is that the oral Law of the Pharisees can actually involve them in trespass against the clear meaning of the written Law and insists that God is much more interested in inward purity than in external freedom from ritual defilement, a position which some Pharisees also argued against their hyper-observant colleagues.

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