

Proper 19
Year C RCL

Jeremiah 4:11-12,22-28

Jeremiah 4:5-10:25 is a collection of oracles that threaten doom and desolation at the hands of an enemy from the north (4:6) and a “dazzling wind” from the desert’s mountains (4:11). The first reference is to a Mesopotamian army that has to enter Palestine from the north because no army can cross the Arabian Desert. The second, the “dazzling wind,” may refer to what locals in Palestine now call the *hamsin* (“fifty [days]”) that brings blistering sand and hot wind from the Sahara for days on end. Although these oracles give no promise of deliverance beyond the words “yet I will not make a full end (4:27),” they do show enormous pity for Judah from the prophet and from the Lord.

Psalm 14

This *wisdom psalm* is repeated almost word for word in the Second Book of the Psalter (Psalm 53) and is the only psalm to occur twice in the Psalter. The “fool” (*naval*) here is not an atheist but a person who lives his/her life as though there were no God in heaven to execute justice. The psalm may be misread to suggest a belief in original sin, but the references in verses 3-4 is to those who in fact *choose* to do evil. Verses 5-6 make clear that there are still those who do live wisely though under oppression from the wicked. The terms “company of the righteous (14:5)” and “the afflicted (14:6)” make it clear that the author does not have some kind of universal sinfulness in mind. Wisdom psalms are for teaching a faithful and profitable approach to life, the instruction of a parent or of a teacher. Verse 7 shows the editorial work of an exilic psalmist who prays in lament style for the restoration of Judah. This modification suggests a new setting for the psalm, perhaps lamentation for Jerusalem by the Jews in Babylon.

or

Exodus 32:7–14

The editor interrupted the story of the golden calf to interject this exchange between God and Moses on Mt. Sinai (Mt. Horeb). The no-holds-barred discussion between the two determines the fate of the nation and underscores the fact that God’s deliverance does not derive from Israel’s piety but from God’s faithfulness. It also reiterates the belief of the writer, from whom the editor drew this account, that God may be approached directly and dealt with on personal, even intimate terms.

Psalm 51:1-11

All biblical *laments* contain complaints to God about hardships the singer is experiencing and petitions for relief from them. Some laments, like this one, acknowledge that these hardships derive from sin. Others like Psalm 6 do not. All laments, however, express trust in God’s power to save and entreat the Lord to live up to the Lord’s public reputation (“name”) for saving those who call upon him. Verses 19–20 were added to this psalm during the Exile to make the psalm a *community lament* instead of an *individual lament*.

1 Timothy 1:12–17

Writing in Paul’s name in accordance with ancient custom, the unknown author of this letter has the first-century Paul address the second-century problem of Gnostic Christianity, a Christianity that promised salvation for the soul in heaven as a result of mystical enlightenment. Against the Gnostics the author has Paul presented give thanks that *his* conversion was a redemption in this world from an old life of ignorance into a life of service here and now.

Luke 15:1–10

Tax collectors paid the taxes for their districts and then received authority to exact whatever they could from the local populace. These thoroughly corrupt officials richly earned all of the resentment they received from the districts oppressed by tax collectors’ greed. That Jesus would accept tax collectors as students (disciples) was utterly offensive not only to the Pharisees but to many others. The generic term “sinners” here probably refers to those Jews who are not observant, people described in the rabbinic literature as *‘am ha-arets* (“people of the land”). The wide range of wrongdoers from tax collectors to “sinners” comprises the population Jesus calls.