

Cycle C, Proper 25

Joel 2:23-3

All that we know about the southern prophet Joel is that he spoke during an otherwise unattested locust plague in Palestine. Most researchers put the time of his prophecy in the post-exilic period (*i. e.* at the end of the 6th century BCE) during which tiny Jerusalem was struggling for survival. The prophet uses the plague of locusts as a figure for an expected invasion of the country by unnamed enemies as punishment for Jerusalem's sin, but verse 25 does give four words for "locust," so the metaphor is very detailed and must reflect an actual event in nature. In 2:28-29 the author affirms that after Jerusalem's repentance all human beings ("all flesh") will receive the divine spirit thus eliminating the need for prophets. The prose ending of the chapter represents the final restoration of Zion's fortunes as an event of cosmic proportions in a language of "portents" (*moftim*) that is much like apocalyptic language. Note: Perhaps because the end of verse 27 sounds like the end of a unit, the Hebrew text begins 3:1 in the next verse. Thus the English Joel 2:28-32 corresponds to the Hebrew 3:1-5.

Psalm 65

A *community thanksgiving*, this psalm was prayed after the answering of a *community lament* in which the congregation had admitted its sin before God and petitioned for relief from calamity--probably famine, as suggested by verses 9-14.

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22

Chapter 14 contains two laments, the first 14:1-10 asks relief from a great drought, and the second 14:17-22 complains of the ravages of war and famine. In between these two laments is a remarkable interchange between God and Jeremiah in which God commands the prophet not to intercede for Judah because they are to be punished for their sins. The prophet refuses this command and argues that Judah has sinned because false prophets have lulled the nation into complacency.

or

Sirach 35:12-17

Joshua (Jesus) ben Sirach began a wisdom school in Jerusalem around the turn of the second century BCE for the instruction of young men in the Law of Moses. Ecclesiasticus (Sirch) is actually a two-volume work (Volume I = chapters 1-23, Volume II = chapters 24-51), composed around 180 BCE. Some 50 years later, ben Sirach's grandson, who had taken a Hebrew manuscript of his grandfather's work to Egypt, translated it into Greek. Verses 12-13 end a section on generosity in offering sacrifice to the Lord, but verses 14-19 remind the wisdom student that God is not for sale and thus cannot be bribed. Sacrifice without fundamental decency is hopeless because the voices of the neglected poor, orphaned, and widowed will find their way to God

Psalm 84:1-6

Like the Apostrophe to Zion from the Dead Sea Psalm Scroll (11QPs^a), this poem is addressed to Zion herself. It is a song sung by pilgrims to a major celebration in Jerusalem. The location of *Baca*

Valley (Psalm 84:5 [MT 84:7]), disingenuously translated in the BCP as “desolate valley,” is unknown. The noun *baka'* means “balsam-tree”; and in the KJV, RSV, and NRSV the Hebrew name is retained as Baca (Psalm 84:6).

2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18

The author has Paul remind his reader that keeping the faith was much more than teaching certain principles but involved standing up alone to answer the calumnies of those opposed to those principles. The true faith that gained for Paul, the laurels of a race well run, was a commitment of his whole life. Thus the unknown author has used the language of sport where the laurel crown is awarded to the winner, not merely one who finishes the race. The impending death of the apostle is grounds, then, for congratulation.

Luke 18:9–14

The contrast in this parable between the Pharisee and the tax collector works only when we remember that the Pharisees were as good and decent as the tax collectors were conniving and reprehensible. Reprehensible they were. The tax collector first paid the entire tax assessed against his district and then was given *carte blanche* to extort as much money in “taxes” for himself from the populace. The Pharisees and later the Rabbis counseled their students to avoid becoming known to the authorities, for the tax roll was the way collectors knew where to find new payees. The redemptive surprise of the parable is that there is a saving prayer available even to tax collectors.

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