

Sunday between July 3 and 9 inclusive

Proper 9, Ordinary/Lectionary 14

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.
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2 Kings 5:1-14

NRSV

Neither the “king of Aram” (Syria) nor the “king of Israel” (v. 5) are named but they are likely Ben-hadad and Jehoram. If so, the date is about 850 BC. The story tells us that Israel's God has made Aram more powerful than Israel: first, note “the LORD had given victory to Aram” (v. 1). “Leprosy” translates a Hebrew word for several skin diseases, some incurable. Sufferers were quarantined, but only in advanced stages of the malady. The captive Israelite “young girl” (v. 2, called a *little maid* by one scholar – in contrast to the mighty Naaman) serves Naaman's wife. “Samaria” (v. 3) is the city (not the land) where Elisha lives. It was normal to bring gifts when approaching a prophet (v. 5). The “gold” weighs about 70 kg (150 lbs); it is of great value. The king of Israel tears his clothes (v. 7) in shock and dismay, unable to handle the situation: an enemy is seeking help! But Elisha is confident: he counsels that here is an opportunity for Naaman to learn about God through him (v. 8). Naaman does not deign to enter Elisha's house (v. 9), so Elisha does not come out to meet him: he “sent a messenger” (v. 10).

Naaman is commanded to wash completely (“seven times”) in the Jordan. V. 11 shows his misconception about how a prophet of God operates; he expects him to behave like a pagan prophet. Elisha's prescription is too simple for him, so he almost rejects it (v. 12). (The “Abana” and “Pharpar” rivers run near Damascus.) Naaman does accept advice *from below*, as he has listened to the advice of the “young girl”. In v. 15, he returns to Elisha and says “I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel”: he acknowledges God as the god of all.

Psalms 30

NRSV

The psalmist clearly praises God for his recovery from grave illness, but this psalm may also be allegorical: its title says that it was sung at the dedication of the Temple, which was desecrated in 164 BC and rededicated in 161 BC. “Sheol”, “the Pit”, (v. 3) was thought of as a place under the earth where the dead existed as mere shadows. In vv. 4-5, the psalmist invites all present to join in giving thanks. In vv. 6-10, he recounts what happened to him. He had felt perfectly secure and healthy (v. 6), but he fell from God's favour (God “hid”, v. 7, from him) – he became ill. Feeling near death, he prayed to God, pointing out that if allowed to go the Sheol, no one, not even God, could hear him. God did hear his prayer and restored him to health and favour (vv. 11-12): his sorrow was turned to joy, even to liturgical “dancing”. He will praise God for the rest of his life.

Galatians 6:(1-6),7-16

NRSV

Paul has written that we are called to freedom, but not licentiousness (5:15). He

calls on the Galatians to live by, and be guided by, the Spirit (5:25). True Christians (those “who have received the Spirit”, v. 1) should gently help those who stray into sin (but even the upright can stray!) The “law of Christ” (v. 2) is the *norm* of mutual love. While each person is expected to bear the normal duties and stresses of daily life him or herself (except for *teachers* lacking time to support themselves financially, v. 6), we are expected to take on, in love, excessive “burdens” (v. 2) for each other. We should not think of ourselves as more than we are (v. 3). Evaluate your own conduct, loving yourself as you should (v. 4). God is not fooled: our works now will determine whether we will have “eternal life” (v. 8). We should do good deeds for all people, and especially for fellow Christians.

So far, Paul has dictated his letter to a scribe. Unused to writing, he now writes in “large letters” (v. 11). V. 12 speaks of Judaisers, *infiltrators* into the Christian community who influence members into thinking that by keeping parts of Mosaic law they can avoid the need to live an ethical life. The Judaisers want to *look good*, thus avoiding persecution by fellow Jews and Judaisers. They want to be able to boast of their own success (“about your flesh”, v. 13) in converting members to their way of thinking, but Paul boasts only in the death, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (“the cross”, v. 14) – by which the old order (the Law) has been eliminated, and he has been freed from it. He and other Christians have entered into the “new creation” (v. 15), the new way – of being shaped by Christ – called “this rule” in v. 16. The Law (“circumcision”, v. 15) has become irrelevant. Christians are the “Israel of God” (v. 16), the new children of Abraham.

Luke 10:1-11,16-20

NRSV

As Jesus has sent out the twelve disciples on a missionary journey within Israel. he now sends others on a mission beyond, for “seventy” is the traditional Jewish number of nations of the world. The *seventy* are “like lambs into the midst of wolves” (v. 3): (1) they are defenceless before hostile people; and (2) Christ inaugurates an era of peace and reconciliation in which “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (Isaiah 65:25). They need to commence without delay (“carry no purse ...”, v. 4) and concentrate on the mission (“greet no one ...”). When you find a receptive person, a *person of peace*, God's peace will be on him or her (v. 6). Accept their hospitality (“the labourer deserves to be paid”, v. 7) and “eat what is set before you” (v. 8, i.e. ignore Jewish dietary laws). Show by action (healing people) and by telling them the good news that “the kingdom of God has come near to you” (v. 9): it's partly already here! Vv. 11-16 tell the *seventy* how to handle hostile situations: tell such people that they will be ignored; the kingdom has come anyway. At the end of the era, they will be judged harshly (v. 12). Then v. 16: in hearing the good news from a disciple, people hear Jesus; if they reject a disciple, they reject Jesus and the Father (“the one who sent me”).

When the *seventy* return, they tell of their surprise that they have power over evil (v. 17), a power Jesus has explicitly given to the Twelve. Jesus has seen their victory over evil forces; he has given them “authority” (v. 19) over Satan (“the enemy”). (To Jews, “snakes and scorpions” were known sources of evil.) Exorcism, in itself, is not a sign of the arrival of God's kingdom (v. 20).