

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 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

NRSV

While David's troops were off fighting the Ammonites, he has lain with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, making her pregnant. David has tried to get Uriah, home on leave, to lie with his wife (so he will think the child is his), but when this has failed, David has ensured that Uriah is killed in the fighting. David has gained a wife and a son, but his actions earn him God's displeasure (11:27). Prophets interpret current events from God's perspective, and foretell the future to which they are leading. Nathan courageously tells David a simple parable (12:1-5), designed to appeal to David's sensibilities. (We recognize the "ewe lamb", 12:3, as being Bathsheba.) David *rises to the bait*, not seeing the parallel. Nathan, of course, identifies the rich man as David (12:7) and gives him a message from God: he has "despised the word of the Lord" (12:9) in doing evil. His divine punishment is internecine warfare ("sword", 12:10); God will disrupt his own household (12:11) and a son will take some of his wives, as he has done Uriah's. There will be one difference: David has attempted to conceal his sin, but all will see his son's (Absalom's) sin. David admits that he has deviated from God's moral standards: they are the ones that count, not his. In 12:13ff, Nathan tells him that God has pardoned him partially: he will live, but the son by Bathsheba will die. The son dies (12:18), but God shows his lasting love for him by giving him another son by Bathsheba, Solomon (12:24).

Psalms 51:1-12

NRSV

The superscription says that this psalm was written after Nathan had brought David to admit his guilt regarding Bathsheba, so when it speaks of rebuilding Jerusalem (v. 18) this may be a reference to public fence-mending David did then. The emphasis is on an *individual's* sin, and prayers for personal pardon and restoration. The psalmist seeks cleansing from "iniquity" (vv. 2, 9) and "sin(s)". The notion of lifelong sinfulness (v. 5) is also in Genesis 8:21: "... for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (although the psalmist may simply be confessing that he has been thoroughly sinful.) In v. 6, he knows that God will seek truth in his very being; this is where he will receive understanding ("wisdom"). Perhaps v. 8b says he is ill – because of his sin. He even asks God to hide his "face from my sins" (v. 9), to be so gracious and compassionate as to *turn a blind eye*. May God restore him, bring him back to godliness, give him a clear conscience, a "clean heart" (v. 10) and a "new ... spirit". Only God can purify. May God give him joy and sustenance, through his "holy spirit" (v. 11).

Ephesians 4:1-16

NRSV

The author has told his readers of the present exalted state of Christ and the Church, the new unity of God's people, and the Church as an established growing

structure where God dwells. Now he tells us the obligations of being members of this new humanity. Paul did spend time in prison in connection with preaching Christ. The author now urges his readers to live a life "worthy of ... [their] calling" as Christians. Unity is paramount, and is to be fostered by the virtues of "humility" (v. 2), "gentleness", "patience" and loving forbearance, the source of which is the Spirit. In vv. 4-7, he lists seven ways in which Christians live in unity. God, transcendent ("above all") and all-pervasive ("through ... and in all") brings these characteristics. As "Father", he bonds us together as children, brothers, and sisters. But, in our oneness, we have diverse gifts. The author interprets Psalm 68:18 as telling of Christ's victory over alien spiritual powers ("captive", v. 8): when he ascended, became exalted, he conquered them. Christ also "descended" (v. 9) in being born a human being. (In Ephesians, all that is *non-human* is *above*.) When he ascended, he gave various gifts: apostleship, prophecy, etc. (v. 8). Together those so endowed were equipped to minister and to build up the Church (v. 12), so "all of us" (v. 13) may work towards common beliefs ("faith") and perfection in being Christ-like. The maturing process requires adherence to true doctrine (v. 14), and "speaking" (v. 15) and doing God's "truth" lovingly, emulating Christ, with each member using his or her gifts "properly" (v. 16).

John 6:24-35

NRSV

Jesus' miraculous provision of food to the crowd has recalled, for John, the gift of manna to the people of Israel in the desert. The crowd has taken Jesus for a political messiah who will free them from Roman occupation. John continues to pursue the question: Who is Jesus? Is he divine?

Jesus and the disciples have escaped the crowds, but only for a while. Rather than tell them of his walking on water (which they would misunderstand), he does not answer them. He tells them that they are seeking him not because they understand the spiritual meaning of the food, but for another free meal (v. 26). He says: raise your sights above material things, to eternal ones, to what I, "the Son of Man will give you" (v. 27). The Father has shown me to be authentic ("seal"). I will give you nourishment for ever. But they have only grasped that the food is miraculous, a work of God, so they ask: how can we do such miracles? (v. 28) Jesus answers: only one "work of God" (v. 29) is essential: to trust in me. Again, they misunderstand; they ask: what proof will you give us? (v. 30). Moses gave us manna from heaven in the wilderness (v. 31); you have only given us earthly food. We expect the Messiah to give us manna again. In v. 32, Jesus tries to clear up the misunderstandings: (1) it was God, not Moses who gave you manna; (2) the Father gives bread now; and (3) manna met physical needs but "true bread" is more than that. Then v. 33: Jesus himself is the true bread, the "bread of God": he "comes ... from heaven and gives life ...". They still do not grasp that *he* is the bread. Finally, he says: I am the sustenance of life itself, of very existence, for those who trust in me; I will fill their every need.