

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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Exodus 17:1-7

NRSV

The Israelites travel “by stages” towards the Promised Land. As God showed his power during their slavery, winning their freedom by inflicting ten plagues on the Egyptians, he now tests the Israelites’ faith in him, as provider and ruler, ten times. If they trust in him, he will save them. This reading is about one of the tests, but who tests whom? (vv. 2, 7). Earlier, at Marah, the people had water but it was bitter; here, at “Rephidim” (v. 1, an oasis in the Negev or Sinai) there is no water at all; the well has run dry. The Israelites are serious: the Hebrew translated “quarrelled” (v. 2) is a legal term. They bring a case against Moses, but to him, their charge is against God: they doubt that he can feed them, be their god, in this hostile desert environment. As in other tests, God simply grants the people’s request, without rebuking them. He orders Moses to take representatives of the people, “some of the elders” (v. 5) to the “rock at Horeb” (v. 6). The elders see his show of power. The parallel with Egypt continues: the “staff” (v. 5) is the same one Moses used to poison the Nile. (“Massah and Meribah”, v. 7, come from words for *test* and *quarrel*.) In giving manna, bread from heaven, earlier, and now water (from an earthly rock), God shows his mastery over creation.

Psalms 95

NRSV

This psalm is known as the *Venite*, the Latin for “come”. Vv. 1-7a are an invitation to worship God. In early Israelite times, God was seen as the supreme deity, “above all [other] gods” (v. 3). He is master and ruler of the universe, for he is creator (vv. 3-5). (“Great King” was a title of emperors in the ancient Near East.) Worship him, for he is saviour, creator, ruler and protector! But worship without obedience is worthless, so “listen to his voice” (v. 7). Failure to adhere to God’s ways will have dire consequences, as it did for the Israelites during their “forty years” (v. 10) in the “wilderness” (v. 8): the Promised Land was God’s “rest” (v. 11, his permanent earthly dwelling place), but none of the “generation” (v. 10) that left Egypt entered it. Lifespans were shorter in those days.

Romans 5:1-11

NRSV

Paul has already demonstrated that “we are justified by faith”. He says that there are three consequences of being *justified* (found worthy in God’s court): (1) “peace with God”, a state of harmony with him, (2) “hope” (v. 2) of sharing his power and eternal life, and (3) being reconciled with him. It is through Christ that we have “access to this grace”, this blessed state of harmony. We also bask in the glory (“boast”) of “our sufferings” (v. 3, and not our accomplishments). Through a progression from them to patient “endurance” under spiritual duress, to maturity in the faith (“character”, v. 4) we come to hope. This is hope of a certainty (“does not disappoint”, v. 5) for God’s love enters our very beings “through the Holy

Spirit” (which is also God’s gift). “For while we were still weak” (v. 6, i.e. before we knew Christ), at the appropriate time in God’s plan, “Christ died for the ungodly”. It would be rare enough for anyone to die for a pious (“righteous”, v. 7) person, and perhaps a bit more likely for a particularly “good person”, but Christ sacrificed his life for us when we were neither: we were unredeemed sinners then! This proves God’s love for us. So even more certainly, having been made worthy through his death (“blood”, v. 9), will we evade adverse judgement (“wrath”) at the end of time. Then we were against God (“enemies”, v. 10), then we were restored to favour with God by Christ’s death. Even more certainly will we be given eternal life (“saved”) by the risen Christ (“by his life”). We even bask in God’s glory through Christ, being now *reconciled* (v. 11).

John 4:5-42

NRSV

Jesus enters Samaria en route from Judea to Galilee. Exhausted by the heat, Jesus rests; his disciples go for food (v. 8). Rabbis did not speak to strange women in public and Jews considered Samaritans ritually unclean, so the woman is surprised by Jesus’ request (v. 9). Jesus answers her: if you knew that God gives to those who ask (“the gift of God”, v. 10) and that I am his agent, you would be the one asking for a drink, “and he would have given you living water”. She misunderstands, thinking that he asks for bubbly spring water. (A legend about Jacob: for him water rose to the top of this well and overflowed.) Are you counting on such a miracle, for “you have no bucket” (v. 11). This water was good enough for Jacob, so are you greater than him? Jesus contrasts the well water with “water gushing up to eternal life” (v. 14). (In John, *living water* is the vehicle of the gift of the Spirit in baptism.) While she still doesn’t understand, she at least now asks (v. 15). Vv. 16-18 are difficult, but they do show that Jesus has insight, so he must be “a prophet” (v. 19), and can therefore resolve a religious dispute: the common ancestors of the two peoples worshipped on Mount Gerizim (“this mountain”, v. 20) but Jews claim that the only proper worship site is Jerusalem. Jesus replies (v. 21): “the hour” of God’s intervention in the world “is coming”; then cultic sites will be irrelevant. Samaritans, by accepting only part of the Bible, denied themselves access to the part of God’s end-time plans given through the prophets (“what you do not know”, v. 22); “Jews” are at least on the right track. The time is both “coming, and ... now here” (v. 23) to worship God spiritually, discerning “truth”, the reality revealed in Jesus. God is “spirit” (v. 24, life-giving power). She decides to wait to understand until the “Messiah” (v. 25) comes, but Jesus tells her: “I am he” (v. 26). In her haste to tell others about this amazing man, she leaves her “water jar” (v. 28) behind. Come, she says, judge for yourselves! Jesus tells his disciples that the food that sustains his life is obeying the Father and completing his task (v. 34). There is no time for delay (v. 35a) for God’s harvest, “gathering fruit for eternal life” (v. 36, conversion to Christ) is ready now. Others have already begun to sow, have preached the good news. Meanwhile, after hearing the woman’s witness, many hear for themselves and come to belief in Christ. Jesus is “truly the Saviour of the world” (v. 42).