

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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Isaiah 55:1-9

NRSV

This chapter concludes a section of the book called *Second Isaiah* by many scholars. It was written during the Exile, after the fall of Babylon to the Persians. This section began with Chapter 40, and key themes presented there are repeated here: the way of the Lord, calling the people to enjoy God's gifts, a new deliverance, the word of the Lord, the king, heaven and earth, God's relationship with Israel, forgiveness, and the participation of other nations.

Vv. 1-3 invite all *who thirst* for God (even the impoverished) to join in his freely-given banquet at the end of time. The meal symbolizes God's love, his abundance. Recall other banquets: (1) in Egypt, after a plague killed every first-born son but *passed over* (did not afflict) Israelite sons; and (2) after Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. Here the banquet is for "everyone". The food is both invaluable ("without price") and cannot be bought ("without money"). God made an "everlasting covenant" (v. 3) with David, making him a great leader and guaranteeing him an enduring line of successors; now this greatness is transferred to Israel ("you"), so that they "may live", i.e. see the promises of long ago fulfilled now and in the future. Now nations who neither know Israel nor are known to her will come seeking Israel's "LORD" (v. 5). All may now "seek the LORD" (v. 6), turn humbly to him, not only in the Temple but wherever he may be found, for "he is near". The invitation to share in the life of this new community is even extended to evildoers who repent and "return to the Lord" (v. 7), for they will be pardoned. God may be "near" but he is transcendent, sufficiently removed not to be contaminated by human sin. His ways are beyond human comprehension (vv. 8-9). Vv. 10-11 say that God's *word* comes gently from him, to permeate the earth and return to him, mission done. His spirit, infused in humans, brings in them godliness, success in furthering God's plan. Vv. 12-13 say that sin will be abolished; all the world will recognize God; creation will be renewed, and all will rejoice. This will be an "everlasting sign" of God's love.

Psalm 63:1-8

NRSV

The psalmist is now separated from God; he remembers him nostalgically; it is as though he is out in the lifeless desert. He recalls encountering God in the Temple ("sanctuary", v. 2). Much as he values life itself as God's great gift, God's "steadfast love" (v. 3), his fidelity in keeping the covenant, is even greater (v. 3). He will "bless" (v. 4, honour) God throughout his life. The abundance God has given him is like a "rich feast" (v. 5). He enjoys an intimate relationship with God: his "soul clings" (v. 8) to God. God has helped him and protected him ("wings", v. 7). God provides his strength ("right hand", v. 8). In vv. 9-10, he asks God to destroy, annihilate, those who seek to make his life worthless; may they be destroyed without

being buried ("prey for jackals"). May the "king" (v. 11, the guarantor of safety for all, and the defender of the oppressed), and all the godly, be joyful at the conquest over the ungodly ("liars").

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

NRSV

Paul warns Christians at Corinth that some of them are not on the path to eternal life: "if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall"! (v. 12) He uses events from the Exodus to illustrate their plight: the Israelites were the Church's spiritual "ancestors" (v. 1); they too were under God's protection ("under the cloud"). Stretching the metaphor, they were "baptised" (v. 2) in passing through the Reed (Red) Sea. Their "spiritual food" (v. 3) was manna; ours is the bread of the Eucharist. Their "spiritual drink" (v. 4) was the water from the rock. Now Christ gives to us; back in Moses' day, the rock gave to them: hence "the rock was Christ". Further, as the rock was with them, Christ is with us. (A Jewish legend says that the rock "followed them".) Even so, Paul says, God showed his anger to many of them, by killing them. To him, these events happened ("occurred", v. 6) and "were written down" (v. 11) so we may avoid evil ways: do not "play" (v. 7), i.e. "indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did" (v. 8); do not test God (by your self-centeredness). When many Israelites tested God (by complaining about the food he provided), they were "destroyed" (vv. 9-10). (Rabbis believed that a special angel, "the destroyer" existed.) We live in the last era ("ages", v. 11) of human history. The "testing" (v. 13) some Corinthians have failed is what humans normally endure; you could have resisted, for God does not test us beyond what we can bear.

Luke 13:1-9

NRSV

Jesus has said that he will return to judge humankind at an unexpected time. Those who know of Christ's coming and use what God gives wisely will be rewarded with God's abundance. Those who know but do not prepare will be condemned. Those who do not know and behave wantonly will be lightly reprimanded. (12:35-48). It was commonly believed that pain and premature death were signs of God's adverse judgement. Now we read of two events where people died prematurely and unexpectedly: one group ("the Galileans", v. 1) doing God's will, killed intentionally as they sacrifice to him in the Temple; the other group ("those eighteen", v. 4, possibly construction workers) killed accidentally. In both cases, Jesus says, there is no link between early death and sin; however, these deaths do show the fate of those who fail to "repent" (vv. 3, 5), to turn to God.

In the parable (vv. 6-9), Jesus elaborates on his call for repentance. (The fig tree symbolizes some Jews, possibly the religious leaders.) Jesus expects those who hear him to *bear fruit* (v. 9), to do his will. If they do not do so immediately, God in his mercy gives them some extra time ("one more year", v. 8) to do so. If they still fail to do so, they will be destroyed. In Matthew 3:10, Jesus speaks of such a tree being "cut down and thrown into the fire". So the *perishing* (vv. 3, 5) is spiritual, at the end of the age.