

*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 25:6-9

NRSV

In 24:21-23, we read that “on that day”, at the end of time, God will punish rebellious heavenly beings and the “kings of the earth”, after imprisoning them for a long time. “... the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and ... he will manifest his glory.” Isaiah speaks of the time when the age will end.

Our passage tells of the divine banquet on Mount Zion (“this mountain”, v. 6), at that time, hosted by God, “for all peoples”, to celebrate the victory over death. God “will destroy ... the shroud” (v. 7) of mourning and ignorance; death will no longer be termination; knowledge of God and his ways will be freely available. This celestial banquet is a symbol of eternal happiness, of the coming of the Kingdom of God. (Recall Jesus’ words at the Last Supper in Mark 14:25: “... I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”) God will destroy the power of death, “the disgrace of his people” (v. 8) for ever. Salvation for all, awaited for ages, will be available “on that day” (v. 9). “The Lord” (whom we identify with Christ) is the awaited saviour. This is an occasion for great rejoicing.

### Psalm 118:1-2,14-24

NRSV

Vv. 1-2 are a call to thanksgiving: God’s mercy, his “steadfast love”, is everlasting. May “Israel” (v. 2) and “those who fear the Lord” (v. 4) proclaim this! Vv. 5-13 say that, when the psalmist (possibly the king) was in distress, he “called on the Lord”, who heard him. With God on his side, there is nothing to fear; trusting in God is better than trusting in humans. Surrounded by his enemies, “in the name of the LORD, I cut them off” (v. 10), with God’s help. V. 15 recalls Exodus 15:2a, Israel’s classic victory song sung by Moses and the Israelites after crossing the Reed Sea. The “glad songs” (v. 15) are heard in the Temple, the community of the faithful. The psalmist expects to live to old age (v. 17); he will proclaim God’s acts of power. He has suffered greatly at God’s hands, as a discipline, but God has preserved his life. He seeks entrance to the Temple (“gates of righteousness”, v. 19) to give thanks; only the godly may enter therein (v. 20). V. 22, possibly based on an ancient proverb, may speak of the king’s rise to power or his victory. On this day (v. 24) God has either saved his people or punished the ungodly – or both. This is a time for rejoicing. In v. 26, all proclaim he who was “rejected” (v. 22), but is now God’s chosen ruler. All the faithful share in the power and blessing of God, who “has given us light” (v. 27).

### Acts 10:34-43

NRSV

The setting is the house of Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment, part of the military occupation force in Palestine. Cornelius, already a believer in God,

has had a vision (vv. 1-8). As a result, he has invited Peter to visit. It is against Jewish law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, but Peter comes anyway, with “some ... believers from Joppa” (v. 23).

The Greek here is rough, full of grammatical errors, unlike the rest of Acts, so we may well have Peter’s unedited words. He tells the assembled company that God does not favour Jews over others: anyone, whatever his nationality, who reveres God and lives in unison with him “is acceptable to him” (v. 35). In vv. 36-38, Peter summarizes Jesus’ earthly ministry; he applies prophecies found in Isaiah 52:7 and 61:1 to Christ. (Psalm 107:20 says “... he sent out his word ...”) Christ is *Kyrios*, “Lord of all” (v. 36). In baptism, the Father “anointed” (v. 38) Jesus “with the Holy Spirit” and with the “power” of God (but he was already integral with God’s very being.) The good news (“message”, v. 37) spread throughout Palestine (“Judea”); he “went about” (v. 38) “doing good” and combatting evil, doing deeds so powerful that it is clear that he was God’s agent: he is a model for all to follow.

He suffered death as one guilty of a capital offence, per Deuteronomy 21:23: he hung on a “tree” (v. 39) and was cursed. (By Jesus’ time, the “tree”, a pole, had acquired a cross-arm.) But, although cursed, the Father “raised him” (v. 40) and “allowed him to appear” to those chosen by God – to be “witnesses” (v. 41). In Luke 24:41-43, Jesus eats broiled fish with them, so he was clearly humanly alive again, i.e. physically brought back from death, resurrected. Jesus, the *Kyrios*, is the one appointed by God to set up the Kingdom and to judge both those who are alive and those who have died at Judgement Day (v. 42). Then v. 43: he fulfills many Old Testament prophecies: he is the one through whom sins are forgiven. Forgiveness is now available to “everyone who believes”, not just to Jews.

### Mark 16:1-8

NRSV

On Saturday after sundown, “when the sabbath was over”, Mary Magdalene (witness to Jesus’ death and burial) and others buy spices to anoint Jesus’ body. (Because Jesus died only hours before the Sabbath, there was no time to anoint it before he was buried. Buying spices on the Sabbath was permitted, but not aromatic oils and salves used for burial preparation.)

Early on Sunday morning (“the first day of the week”, v. 2), they go to the tomb, wondering who will roll away the heavy disk-shaped “stone” (v. 3) forming its door. (A tomb was cut out of the rock, and the “stone” ran in a track.) But they find the tomb open (v. 4) and realize what the empty tomb means: “he has been raised” (v. 6).

The “young man, dressed in a white robe” (v. 5) is a heavenly messenger; he probably sits on a shelf intended for a body. It is the faithful women who first hear the Easter message. In v. 7, the angel tells them to inform the disciples that he “is going ahead of” them, will appear to them in Galilee, just as he told them during his earthly ministry. The women flee, seized with “terror and amazement” (v. 8), overcome with awe.