

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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1 Samuel 17:57-18:5,10-16

NRSV

David has stunned Goliath with a sling (17:49) and killed him with a sword (17:51). “Abner” (17:57), the “commander of the army” (17:55), brings David to Saul. 18:1-4 tell of the deep friendship between David and Jonathan (Saul’s son and heir). “Jonathan made a covenant with David”, giving him gifts that symbolize the transfer of royal succession to him (“robe”, “armour”, “sword”, 18:4). Because David is so successful militarily, Saul makes him commander of the army (18:5), but when the people (“women”, 18:7) sing that he is ten times superior to Saul in his accomplishments, Saul becomes “very angry” (18:8). Saul is jealous of David “from that day on” (18:9).

In 18:10-11, Saul attempts to kill David, but is unsuccessful. (Note that even “an evil spirit” is “from God”, i.e. part of his creation.) “Saul was afraid of David” (18:12), because God helps David and has rejected Saul. David is demoted, but (presumably after another victory), the troops acclaim him commander of the army (“came in, leading the army”, 18:13). Saul’s fear of David changes to “awe of him” (18:15), but all the people love him (18:16). (“Israel and Judah” probably shows that this verse was edited during the Divided Monarchy, at least eighty years after the events described here.)

In the following verses, Saul promises David his first daughter (“Merab”, 18:17) as his wife, but he reneges on the offer (18:19). David continues to be victorious over the Philistines. Expecting David to be killed in battle, Saul then offers David his second daughter, “Michal” (18:20), whom he considers a “snare” (18:21) for David: the “marriage present” (18:25) is to be one hundred Philistine corpses. Realizing that Michal loves David, “Saul was David’s enemy from that time forward” (18:29). Jonathan persuades Saul to promise not to kill David – by arguing that David has been faithful to Saul, and that by killing David he would be committing a sin against an innocent person (19:4-5). Even so, Saul plans to kill David, but Michal foils the attempt (19:12-16).

Psalm 133

NRSV

Deuteronomy 25:5 requires that “when kindred [brothers] reside together”, in order to preserve close family ties, a widow lacking a son be married to her brother-in-law, and bear a son by him – thus continuing her husband’s lineage. Although not mentioned *per se*, this psalm speaks of the Temple: from which people believed God’s benefits (“oil”, v. 2 and “dew”, v. 3) flowed into human life. “Aaron” (v. 2) is the ancestor of, and model for, all high priests. A high priest was ordained with great quantities of “oil”, so living in community has manifold blessings. Mount “Hermon” (v. 3, a high mountain in Syria) provided relief from the

hot climate; the “dew” from “Zion”, God, is even more refreshing, for it is life itself, flowing from the one who is “forevermore”. God has blessed Jerusalem, providing all the blessings of this life. (Life after death was unknown then.)

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

NRSV

As Paul and his coworkers, Timothy and Apollos, (*servants*) work together with God (the Holy Spirit), they urge the Christians at Corinth to “accept the grace of God” productively, i.e. “not ... in vain”. Based on Isaiah 49:8 (“have”, v. 2, is prophetic), Paul tells them that now is the time when God gives grace, his love to us: now we are being restored to union with God. The *servants* are aiding “in every way” (v. 4) they can. They have shown themselves true agents of God in enduring physical and mental pressures (“afflictions”, vv. 4, 5a) and “hardships” (listed in v. 5b) – unlike Paul’s critics – by the *fruits of the Spirit* (vv. 6, 7a and Galatians 5:22-23), using the whole offensive (“right hand”, v. 7) and defensive (“the left”) armament which God provides, whether honoured or discredited (by their critics, who even call them “impostors”, v. 8, i.e. not true to God.) Seen as insignificant (as bad teachers), they are valued by true Christians, “dying” (v. 9) to self-centeredness but alive in following Christ; “sorrowful” (v. 10) that the Corinthian Christians feel hurt that he refused their aid (he did not need it), yet “rejoicing” that they are faithful; living in poverty, yet “making many rich” spiritually and “possessing everything” that matters.

They have laid everything (their innermost thoughts) on the table to the Church (v. 11). He loves without limits all at Corinth – even his opponents who do not love him. May his critics grow up (“children”, v. 13) and imitate his love.

Mark 4:35-41

NRSV

Jesus has told the good news of the Kingdom to the crowds, in a way they could understand, but he has gone further with those close to him: “he explained everything in private to his disciples” (vv. 33-34).

After teaching from a boat, with the crowds along the shore, he now suggests to the disciples that they “go across to the other side” (v. 35), to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. A flotilla of boats follow, but they scatter before the storm. (He is “just as he was”, v. 36, in the same posture as earlier, in the boat.) Squalls (“windstorm”, v. 37) are common on the Sea of Galilee, for the hills around it are high. Jesus is “in the stern”, v. 38, on the helmsman’s seat, well above the waves. He is “asleep”: he has complete confidence in God. The disciples see him as “teacher”; they do not yet know him fully. Jesus is awoken and *rebukes* (v. 39) the wind – as though it is a demon (see 1:25). To ancients, the sea symbolized the powers of chaos and evil. Jesus commands it to be still: only God can control nature. He castigates the disciples (v. 40): either they lack faith in God (do not follow Jesus’ example of trust in him) or in him (as a worker of wonders). Their question in v. 41 is an implicit confession of Jesus’ divinity: the sea obeys him as it does God in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:2). Jesus’ power extends even to power over natural disasters, then thought to be the work of the devil.

