

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 1:1,17-27

NRSV

1 Samuel 31:1-13 tells of a battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (near the Sea of Galilee). This time, the Philistines defeat the Israelites, led by Saul. Jonathan, Saul's son and heir, is killed; Saul is so badly wounded that he takes his own life. Meanwhile, David has "returned from defeating the Amalekites" (v. 1), a nomadic tribe in the southern deserts, to "Ziklag" (near Gaza). 2 Samuel 2:2-16 present a different story of Saul's death, as told by an Amalekite, a resident of Israel but not a citizen. He comes to David, saying that he has escaped from the battlefield after killing Saul, gravely injured, at his request. He brings Saul's crown to David, his lord. David and his troops mourn the loss of Saul and his son, and Israel's defeat. Because the Amalekite did not fear to kill "the Lord's anointed" (v. 14), David has him killed.

Vv. 18-27 are a commemorative poem for Saul and Jonathan. The "Bow" was a common weapon; the "Book of Jashar" (v. 18, Joshua 10:13), apparently a collection of poems, no longer exists. "How the mighty have fallen" (v. 19) occurs three times: the way is now open for David's ascension to the throne. "Gath" (v. 20) and "Ashkelon" are Philistine cities: do not tell the Philistines ("the uncircumcised") about the deaths because they may see Israel's lack of leadership as an opportunity for an easy victory. "The shield of the mighty was defiled" (v. 21) tells of Israel's defencelessness. Kings were "anointed with oil". Saul and his son are to be remembered for their courage (vv. 22-23); Saul's reign was a prosperous time. The "high places" (v. 25) are Mount "Gilboa" (v. 21).

Psalm 130

NRSV

This is a prayer for deliverance from personal trouble, but it ends with a message to all people. The "depths" are the chaotic waters, separation from God – as in Jonah's prayer from the stomach of the great fish (Jonah 2:2). May God be attentive to my pleas. God forgives, so he shall be "revered" (v. 4). If God were to record all our misdeeds, how could anyone face him? He is merciful by nature, so I eagerly await his help, his "word" (v. 5), a prophecy from him. I wait as do watchmen guarding a town from enemy attack (v. 6). Perhaps (v. 7) the psalmist has now received a prophecy of salvation which he tells to all Israel: wait in hope for God; he offers unfailing "love", freedom from grievous sin.

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

NRSV

The mother church, Jerusalem, is again in financial need. Christians at Corinth began collecting funds for them "last year" (v. 10), but appear to have stopped – perhaps due to the disagreements mentioned earlier in the epistle. "Now finish doing it" (v. 11), Paul urges, but does not demand: "I do not say this as a com-

mand" (v. 8). Meanwhile, the churches of Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Beroea), far from affluent, have contributed beyond measure to the *Jerusalem Fund*.

The Christians at Corinth were quarrelsome and divided at times, even regarding baptism (1 Corinthians 1:10-17); so v. 7 is probably a *pep talk*, intended to *damn his readers faintly* (without them realizing it): spiritual gifts seem to have been rare at Corinth. Note the realism: "our love for you" not *your love for us*. The Macedonians have been earnest in their giving; may the Corinthians be as genuine, by putting their words into action. Our great example of self-giving is "Jesus" (v. 9): as Son, he was "rich", being equal to the Father, but he became human ("poor") so that we may enjoy salvation. One's gift should be commensurate with one's means (v. 12); commitment to the cause ("eagerness") matters. Givers should attain a "fair balance" (v. 13): relieving the poverty of others but not impoverishing themselves. As a guideline, Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 (v. 15): when God supplied manna in the desert, all had just sufficient, so the Corinthians should avoid gross inequalities in wealth.

Mark 5:21-43

NRSV

After stilling the storm at sea and curing a demoniac on the eastern shore of the Lake of Galilee, Jesus returns to Jewish territory on the western ("other") shore. In extremis, even "Jairus" (v. 22), a religious authority, seeks out Jesus, hoping for a cure for his daughter's terminal illness (vv. 22-23). Jairus seeks that she be "made well", as does the woman in vv. 25-34: the Greek word includes the idea of rescue from impending destruction (annihilation).

In the crowd pressing in on Jesus is a woman who has long suffered from "hemorrhages" (v. 25). She pushes through the crowd, and touches Jesus' "cloak" (v. 27) believing, trusting, that touching him will make her well (v. 28). The cure is instant and complete (v. 29), as was Jesus' quelling of the storm (4:39), of the forces of chaos; he has full power over disease, even when doing nothing. Jesus senses, in the crush of the crowd, that someone has been healed. She tells the "whole truth" (v. 33): what she has done, and the result. Perhaps she is in "fear and trembling" for making Jesus ritually unclean; perhaps in awe at the miracle.

Returning to the first story (v. 35), Jesus and his disciples hear that the girl has died: surely no one can restore life. As during the storm, Jesus says "Do not fear, only believe" (v. 36). The inner circle of disciples ("Peter, James, and John", v. 37) go with him to Jairus' house. Jesus rebukes, and throws out, the professional mourners ("them", v. 39). The disciples and the girl's family witness her recovery. In terms of the Kingdom, she is "not dead but sleeping" (v. 39): physical death is only a temporary hiatus of activity (like sleeping). To unbelievers, this is laughable. "Talitha cum" (v. 41) are Jesus' words in Aramaic. Again, the cure is instant and complete. The witnesses are "overcome with amazement" (v. 42): it really is a miracle. Jesus orders them not to tell the story yet; perhaps he wants to wait until his own resurrection so the event will make sense to people. Perhaps asking them to feed her foreshadows his eating with the disciples after his resurrection.