

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 11:1-15

NRSV

David has enjoyed military success over most of the neighbouring nations. This time, he sends Joab, his commander, with even his own bodyguard (“his officers”) and the whole army (“all Israel”) to besiege “Rabbah” (now Amman, Jordan) – “but David remained at Jerusalem”. Bathsheba is daughter and wife of great warriors (v. 3). (The *Hittites* came from Turkey and conquered Syria and Palestine but by this time their empire had crumbled; Uriah has joined the Israelites.) The law (later codified) said that a woman was ritually unclean for seven days after menstruation (v. 4). Bathsheba conceives by David (v. 5).

David tries to cover his tracks. Uriah is home on leave; if he will lie with his wife, he will think the child is his. David invites him to “wash your feet” (v. 8), normal after a journey, and here a euphemism for *have sexual intercourse*, but Uriah refuses to break the ritual purity of the warrior (v. 11); he sleeps outside (v. 9). For “in booths” (v. 11), the Revised English Bible has *under canvas*: the ark accompanied the troops into battle, and was housed in a tent. David offers to delay Uriah’s return to the fighting (v. 12). Even when made drunk, Uriah “did not go down to his house” (v. 13). So David tries another approach: Joab is to place Uriah in a vulnerable position so he will be killed (v. 15); and he is (vv. 16-17). David’s sin costs Uriah his life; next week we hear of further consequences.

Psalms 14

NRSV

This psalm laments the breakdown of moral order. “Fools” are not atheists, but rather those who deny that God is concerned with human behaviour. (Proverbs 10:23 contrasts the “fool” with the “person of understanding”.) To the psalmist, the world is full of such fools, people who are “corrupt” and do terrible things. God, he says, sees no one who seeks to follow God’s ways (v. 2). V. 4 asks: do these wicked people not understand God at all? (Micah 3:2-3 too speaks of preying on the godly as eating them.) But (v. 5) the ungodly will be *in dire alarm* (Revised English Bible), for God is in the community of those who follow his ways. Even though the godly seem to be *under the thumb* of the deviants, God will protect them. Oh that God, whose earthly residence is the Temple (“Zion”, v. 7) would deliver the oppressed from the ungodly! When he does, all Israel, Jacob’s descendants, will rejoice.

Ephesians 3:14-21

NRSV

The author, writing in Paul’s name, has told us of Paul’s insistence on Gentiles being the equal of Jews in the Church. He has written: “Gentiles have become fellow heirs” (v. 6), members of the same Church as Jews, sharers in Christ’s saving activity, as part of God’s plan. Because of his (Gentile) readers’ “faith in the Lord

Jesus and ... [their] love toward all the saints” (1:15) and because they are sharers in the “boundless riches of Christ” (v. 8) and should not “lose heart over ... [his] sufferings” (v. 13), he now prays to the Father (v. 14), kneeling in solemnity, to God the source of life itself, of very existence (“name”, v. 15). (In Greek, *patria*, “family” is a pun on *pater*, “Father”, v. 14.)

His prayer includes four petitions: (1) for inward strengthening (“inner being”, v. 16) through the Spirit; (2) for the Risen Jesus to be the source of (“rooted”, v. 17), and basis for (“grounded”), their outward expression of love; (3) that God may give them the power to understand (as all can) the totality of Christ’s love (v. 18 – or of God’s saving plan for humans); and (4) to so know Christ’s love that they grow into full knowledge of God’s ways (v. 19). (Stoic philosophy sought systematized knowledge of all, but for Christians experiential knowledge of God’s love is infinitely more than this.) The prayer concludes (vv. 20-21) with a *doxology*, praise to God, for whom there are no limits to achievement, and whose actions we can in no way limit: may his power, shown in Christ, be shown in the Church, in its life, for all to see.

John 6:1-21

NRSV

The stories of the feeding of the five thousand and of Jesus walking on the water are familiar to us from the other gospels, but John presents them a little differently. Most obviously, note “Sea of Tiberias” (v. 1): this was the official Roman name for the Sea of Galilee. John is concerned to *locate* the events precisely geographically and in time (“Passover”, v. 4), although “after this” (v. 1, also used elsewhere in the book) is somewhat vague. John tells us about certain *signs* (of which these stories are two) which he hopes will encourage belief, be a starting point for understanding Jesus, and show Christ for who he is.

The crowds are attracted by Jesus’ miracles (“signs”, v. 2) but faith in him is only skin-deep. Note the links to the story of the Exodus, of Israel’s deliverance and of the formation of the *first Israel*: the “mountain” (vv. 3, 15, Sinai), Jesus’ question to Philip and his answer (vv. 5-7, like Moses’ question to God and God’s answer – when God gives the people meat to eat), and feeding the crowd (vv. 11-13, like the gift of manna in the wilderness.) Philip thinks in material terms, as did Moses (v. 7), but Andrew is more resourceful (vv. 8-9). “Barley loaves” were the food of the poor.

V. 11 looks forward to the Last Supper; “given thanks” translates *eucharistesas*. In v. 14, the people misunderstand who Jesus is; they believe him to be “the prophet”. (In Deuteronomy 18:18, God tells Moses that he will raise a prophet like Moses who will speak what God commands. By Jesus’ time, people expected a prophet to come to usher in the age to come, the messianic age.) The people want to make him a king, a political Messiah, but Jesus refuses (v. 15). Note “Jesus had not yet come to them” (v. 17): John assumes that his readers already know the story. In v. 20, “It is I” translates the Greek phrase *ego eimi* – the words which God uses to identify himself to Moses in the Greek translation of Exodus 3:14.