

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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Jeremiah 31:1-6

NRSV

Jeremiah witnessed the fall of Jerusalem. The city was first overrun by the Babylonians in 597 BC; ten years later they occupied the whole of Judea and deported many of the leaders. Today's reading is a prophecy that the exile will end, that God will not desert Israel. It depicts the return from exile as a new exodus. The people "found grace in the wilderness" (v. 2), God loved them then and has done ever since. His love is "everlasting" (v. 3). The nation of Israel will be rebuilt, the people will make merry, and agriculture will prosper (v. 5). Even in Ephraim, the first part of the country to be conquered, the call will be to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem ("Zion", v. 6).

Psalms 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. 12), 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.

Vv. 44-48 tell of the immediate gift of the Holy Spirit to "all who heard the word". The Jews "who had come with Peter" (v. 45) are "astounded" that even non-Jews receive the Spirit – the evidence being that they too speak "in tongues" (v. 46), praising God. Peter then commands that the converts be baptised.

Matthew 28:1-10

NRSV

On Friday, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James ("the other Mary") have seen Jesus' body laid in the tomb, the stone door sealed, and a guard mounted. Now, soon after dawn on Sunday morning ("the first day of the week") they return to "see" and probably to mourn. Matthew highlights important milestones with displays of cosmic power, God's power: here, and when Jesus died, an "earthquake" (v. 2), which heralds the arrival of "an angel", a messenger from God. The sealing of the tomb has marked death's victory, but now God's agent rolls back the door ("stone") and sits on it – symbolizing Jesus' triumph over death. The angel's "appearance" (v. 3) shows God's presence and power ("like lightning"); his clothing is like Jesus transfigured. The guards are paralysed with "fear" (v. 4), but the angel is no threat to the women ("Do not be afraid", v. 5). As Jesus has told his disciples ("as he said", v. 6), Jesus has risen from the dead. The disciples will see him again in Galilee. The women leave the tomb filled with awe ("fear", v. 8) and "great joy". Jesus meets the Marys again later (v. 9). That they "took hold of his feet" attests to his bodily resurrection. Jesus refers to the disciples as "brothers" (v. 10): he has forgiven them for deserting him.