

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 6:1-8,(9-13)

NRSV

In this passage, Isaiah gives the grounds for his authority as a prophet. The “year” is 742 BC. Assyria is expanding its borders. (“Uzziah” is called “Azariah” in 2 Kings 14:21.) The northern kingdom, Israel, is trying to coerce Judah into a military alliance against the Assyrian threat.

Isaiah has a vision of God enthroned, surrounded by courtiers, with “seraphs” (v. 2, griffin-like creatures), hovering above him, guarding him. One pair of wings cover “their faces” in the awesome presence of God, and a second cover their genitals (“feet” is a euphemism) as a sign of commitment to purity; the third is used to fulfil commissions from God. “Holy” (v. 3), repeated three times for emphasis, identifies God as *all-holy*, sinless, apart from earthly things. God is “Lord of hosts”, the warrior for Israel; he rules over “the whole earth”, all peoples. The setting appears to be the Temple, so the “pivots” (v. 4), which shake due to an earth tremor (a sign of God’s presence), are those on which the heavy Temple gates turned. “Smoke” is also a sign of divine presence, as is the cloud of glory in the desert (Exodus 40:34).

Isaiah feels totally inadequate in God’s presence: he feels “unclean” (v. 5), unfit to stand before God, yet he sees God. He also sees the “people” (either Judah or his disciples) as unworthy, but a “seraph” (v. 7), an agent of God, purifies him, rendering him fit and qualified to speak God’s word to his people. God confers with his advisors: “Whom shall I send?” (v. 8), and Isaiah volunteers to be prophet to Judah. In vv. 9-13, God accepts his offer, and tells him that most people will reject God’s message (they will not *hear* it and will fail to understand it), preferring traditional (corrupt) ways. But a small number (“its stump”, v. 13) will accept it. Most will be destroyed; even the remnant will endure difficult times. Within nine years, Assyria had invaded Israel and made Judah a puppet state.

Psalm 138

NRSV

The psalmist expresses his gratitude for God’s steadfast, enduring love and his care for his faithful followers, for whom he will fulfill his purpose (v. 8). Vv. 1-2 picture the psalmist in the courtyard of the Temple (“toward”, v. 2) to offer thanks. For v. 2b, the Revised English Bible has: “for you have exalted your promises above the heavens”. V. 3 tells of the psalmist’s experience: when he called upon God, he not only answered but “made me bold and strong” (REB). Vv. 4-5 are a hymn of praise. The REB begins vv. 4 and 5 with “Let”: may “all the kings” praise God when they hear his words; may they sing of God’s ways, because (v. 6), exalted as he is, he cares for “the lowly” but takes note of the errors of the unjustly proud (“haughty”). Vv. 7-8 are an expression of faith, of trust and acknowledgement. In spite of his troubles, God preserves the psalmist, exercising

divine power against his foes. (God’s power is his “right hand”, v. 7.)

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

NRSV

Paul has heard that some at Corinth deny the physical resurrection of the body, claiming that only the spirit matters. Now he argues against this view. He says: I draw your attention to the “good news” that I proclaimed to you, which you “received” (v. 1), “in which ... you stand” and “through which ... you are being saved” (v. 2) – assuming that “you” embrace this “message” (and are doing it). I ask you to note the *form of the words* I used – unless (in not accepting the message fully) “you have come to believe” to no purpose. The most important tenets I handed on to you are: “Christ died for our sins” (v. 3), “he was buried” (v. 4, he really died), “was raised ...” and appeared to various persons and groups. His death, burial and rising again were “in accordance with the scriptures”, part of God’s plan. (Only the appearances to Peter, “Cephas”, v. 5, and to the “twelve” are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.) I, Paul says, was the last to see him: I, a *monster* (in appearance or as persecutor of the Church), the “least of the apostles” (v. 9). I, through “the grace of God” (v. 10), have achieved more than any other apostle. We all (“I or they”, v. 11) proclaim the same good news; this is how “you have come to believe”.

Luke 5:1-11

NRSV

This is a story of commitment to Jesus – to his message and his destiny. Luke first mentions Simon (Peter) in 4:38; now Jesus calls him to be a disciple. In the preceding chapter, we read of hostility to Jesus; we also learn what preaching the good news of the kingdom of God involves. We can see the similarity of this passage to stories in Mark and John: (1) vv. 1-3 are like Mark 4:1-2; (2) vv. 4-9 are like the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in John 21:1-11; (3) vv. 10-11 are like Mark 1:18-20. Perhaps Luke has taken parts of two sources used by Mark and John and merged them into one story, but perhaps he is using a story not found in other gospels.

The “lake of Gennesaret” (v. 1) is the Sea of Galilee. Gennesaret is the plain on its southwestern shore. The “word of God” in Luke and Acts is the Christian message. Are Peter and Jesus in one boat and “James and John” (v. 10) in the other, or they are all in the same boat? The question probably arises because Luke has merged two stories. Reading on through the gospel, we come to realize that Luke has a great respect and appreciation for Peter – called “Peter” for the first time in v. 8, but not again until 6:14, when Jesus chooses twelve of his disciples. In v. 8, Peter responds to Jesus’ action with personal self-judgement – because he recognizes in Jesus more-than-human power. In v. 5, in calling him “Master” (equivalent to *teacher*), Peter is willing to obey Jesus’ command out of duty; then in v. 8 he calls him “Lord”, showing his belief. V. 10 is a milestone (“from now on”). The Greek verb *zogron* (“catching”) was commonly used of teachers: they *caught* their students and thereby brought them new life. Peter, James and John make a total commitment (“left everything”, v. 11).