

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Third Sunday in Lent (A)

Exodus 17.1-7

Psalm 95

Romans 5.1-11

John 4.5-42

Exodus 17.1-7

1. This incident takes place during the period when the Israelites journey to Sinai after the Egyptians have been destroyed.
 - a. This is the third time the people test God.
 - i. At Marah they complained of the bitter water (15.22-27).
 - ii. In the wilderness they complained of food, and were given quails and manna (16.1-36).
 - iii. Now, they complain of water again.
2. The people are described as “quarreling”. The term in Hebrew is stronger, connoting a formal charge against Moses (who tells the LORD that the people are “almost ready to stone me”).
 - a. Moses recognizes, however, that the people’s “quarrel” is with God.
 - i. The name “Massah” is a play on the Hebrew root *nissâ* (to test), and “Meribah” on *rîb* (to quarrel).
3. As in the previous tests there is no divine rebuke, but only a command of what to do.
 - a. The final verse (“Is the LORD among us or not?”) neatly sums up what it means to test God.

Psalm 95

1. From the first centuries of the Church, Psalm 95, either in full or in part, has been used liturgically as an introduction to divine service. In abbreviated form, the psalm is the *Venite, exultemus* of Morning Prayer. (The full psalm is used in Lent.)
2. While the psalm is often thought of as having two contrasting halves, it is an integrated whole if it is read as instructive, as a *sermon* on our right relationship with God.
 - a. The “halves” may be considered to be a hymn celebrating God’s kingship and a prophetic oracle.
 - i. Indeed, the prophetic oracle which begins at v. 8 may be considered to be the LORD Himself speaking.
3. The language in the psalm is liturgical, and may reflect an actual recitation used on entering the Temple. (In Hebrew, the words in v. 6, “Come, let us bow down ...” are stated as imperative, and reflect an actual posture of submission.)
4. If the psalm is seen as a call to prayer followed by instruction, it may be seen as a reminder of our right relationship with God.
 - a. The two halves of the psalm can be viewed, therefore, as a conditional oath, and “if/but” statement of the fealty that God demands.

Romans 5.1-11

1. Paul focuses on the central theme of all his theology: The love of God assures salvation to those justified by faith.
 - a. The beginning of ch. 5 states the theme succinctly: The justified Christian, reconciled to God, will be saved, sharing with hope in Christ's risen life.
2. We enjoy peace. Reconciliation replaces estrangement, because we have been introduced into the sphere of divine favor through Jesus.
 - a. Standing in the relationship with God, we have a confident hope.
 - b. The hope of God's glory is not illusory. It is founded on God's love.
 - i. This is proven by the fact that while we were still helpless, in sin, God sent His Son to make atonement for us.
 - ii. There is no *quid pro quo* in God's love. His love is manifested to the sinner even though the sinner is estranged from Him.
 - iii. We are justified through Jesus' blood and our faith in His saving grace.
3. We "boast" of God. Whereas before we stood in fear of God's wrath, now, having been justified, we boast of His love.

John 4.5-42

1. The conversion of large numbers of Samaritans culminates in the realization that Jesus is the "Savior of the world".
2. John plays on a number of conventions in the story.
 - a. Jesus is in hostile territory, in Samaria.
 - b. He speaks to a woman in public.
 - c. He speaks to her at the well, at noon. This shocks the disciples, because to meet a woman at midday at a well connoted courtship, seeking a wife.
3. The woman focuses on differences in worship (between Mt. Gerizim and Jerusalem). Jesus tells her that the time is now come when worship will not be a matter of place and ritual, but of worship in the Spirit.
4. The Samaritans believe first on the basis of what the woman has told them, and then on the basis of what they have heard from Jesus.
 - a. They call Him "Savior," a title which does not otherwise occur in John.
 - i. This is not a title derived from Samaritan expectations.
 - ii. Just as the Samaritans change in what they seek, so must the Jews.
 1. This theme is developed in the contrast between Jesus in this passage being "greater than Jacob" and the dialogue in ch. 8, when the Jews challenge Jesus, "are you greater than Abraham?" The point is that He is greater in each instance.
5. Luke uses the title "Savior" three times (in the infancy narrative at 2.11, and at Acts 5.31 and 13.23). The term also appears at 1 John 4.14.
 - a. Paul refers to the exalted Jesus, coming at the day of judgment, as Savior (Phil. 3.20).

- b. The term is otherwise unknown in the first Christian writings, but becomes more common after the first century, as the Pastoral Epistles become known.
6. V. 26 is often taken to be Jesus' self-identification as Messiah, "I who speak to you am he." In the Greek original, however, it is manifestly apparent that Jesus self-identifies as One far greater than Messiah!
- a. In the original, the word order is *Legei auté ho Iesus, Ego eimí, ho lalōn soi*, literally "Says to her [the] Jesus, I AM, the one who is speaking to you."
 - i. Jesus identifies Himself using the Holy Name, I AM (Exod. 3.14), as the LORD, God Almighty!
 - 1. Elsewhere in John's gospel, every *Ego eimí* (I AM) is accompanied by a "sign", by an action (*e.g.*, the multiplication of loaves and fishes) which points to who Jesus really is. These "signs" are referred to by the other evangelists as miracles.
 - 2. Those who oppose Jesus recognize what He claims. They seek to stone Him when he says "... before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn. 8.58, *capitalization supplied*).
 - b. John is showing how those who acclaim Jesus as Savior must also recognize and serve Him as Lord.