

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary

Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for August 13, 2017

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost Proper 14

THE READINGS

First Reading: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 *Alternate: 1 Kings 19:9-18*

¹ Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan.

² This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

...

¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them."

He answered, "Here I am."

¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me."

So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem, ¹⁵ and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"

¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."

¹⁷ The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'"

So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸ They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²² Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" – that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. ²⁵ Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.

²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh."

And his brothers agreed. ²⁸ When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And

they took Joseph to Egypt.

Worth Noting: It's a cliff-hanger! Are the Ishmaelites and the Midianites the same people? Or did the Midianites outbid the Ishmaelites for Joseph? How well will Joseph, a sensitive tattle-tale, hold up as a slave in Egypt? Tune in next week for another exciting episode of "The God of the Family of Abraham"!

Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b *Alternate: Psalm 85:8-13*

- ¹ O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- ² Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
- ³ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- ⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.
- ⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
- ⁶ O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

- ¹⁶ When he summoned famine against the land,
and broke every staff of bread,
- ¹⁷ he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
- ¹⁸ His feet were hurt with fetters,
his neck was put in a collar of iron;
- ¹⁹ until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD kept testing him.
- ²⁰ The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
- ²¹ He made him lord of his house,
and ruler of all his possessions,
- ²² to instruct his officials at his pleasure,
and to teach his elders wisdom.
- ^{45B} Praise the LORD!

Worth Noting: How could the "word of the LORD" test Joseph or anyone else? Here, "word" translates the Hebrew dbr that is often translated "deed" or "action." Of course, God's speech created the world (Genesis 1:3), and "test" might also be taken as "smelted" or "refined." Does that help make more sense?

Second Reading: Romans 10:5-15

⁵ Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them."⁶ But the righteousness that comes from faith says,

“Do not say in your heart,
‘Who will ascend into heaven?’”

(that is, to bring Christ down)⁷

“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’”

(that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.¹¹ The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.”¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Worth Noting: If we take nothing else from the eight weeks of Romans, let it be this: Paul does not deny that those who follow the Law will live, will be righteous (Romans 10:5). He simply related to his audience that his Gospel to the Gentiles is different (because Gentiles are different) and it is his vocation to bring to the Gentiles this message (responding to the questions in Romans 10:14-15). How are Jews viewed in your community: as siblings who share a father or as derelict relatives who have rejected the path to salvation? Sometimes one and sometimes the other?

Gospel: Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately he [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear.

²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸ Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

²⁹ He said, “Come.”

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Worth Noting: The story of Peter's walking in faith and sinking in doubt provides the perfect analogy of our own struggles. Peter experiences what we all experience, the inevitable mixture of belief and doubt. Never can there be one without the other. How do you experience this mixture in your life?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

The authors of *Journeying* endorse the consensus of Bible scholars that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest Gospel we have and that the Gospel of Matthew drew on Mark for much of its structure and content. While using Mark, the author of Matthew made significant changes that shed light on the particular concerns of the author and the author's community. This Gospel passage includes two significant changes to Mark's story (you may wish to reread Mark 6:45-53). First of all, Matthew adds the incident of Peter walking on the water. Since Peter's attempt is recorded in no other Gospel, we may surmise that it held special significance for the Matthean community. Indeed, Peter seems to hold a special place in the memory of this community, listed first among the apostles (Matthew 10:2) and serving as their spokesperson (for example Matthew 15:15; 18:21). It is Peter who speaks for the others and for the Church in proclaiming Jesus Messiah and Son of God (Matthew 16:13-19). Peter plays such an important role in Matthew that many think he may have served as one of the founders of the community of Christ followers, ancestors in faith to Matthew's community.

The second major change is in the attitude of the apostles at the conclusion of the whole incident. Mark says that the apostles were "astounded" and "did not understand" (Mark 6: 52, 53). In contrast to a state of confusion, in Matthew's version the apostles worship Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 14:33). For whatever reason, Mark portrays the apostles as never understanding Jesus or his mission, while Matthew remembers them as being more like the members of his community – struggling but committed to following Jesus. (In this regard, you may wish to compare the versions of the story of the request by [Mark 10:35-46] or on behalf of [Matthew 20:20-28] James and John to sit one at the glorified Jesus' right hand and one on his left.) While accepting their very human limitations, Matthew wants to avoid unnecessarily disparaging the founding fathers of this community.

To ask "who was right: Mark or Matthew?" is to miss the point of the Church's wisdom of including both texts within the New Testament. To make a larger point, the purpose of preserving all of the different competing and conflicting voices in the Bible is not to provide the reader/believer with certainty, but to generate questions that will in turn provoke further study and prayerful reflection.

Of Pop Quizzes, Finals, and Other Tests

Peter is the impetuous one with whom we all sympathize. Maybe he can't swim but he's out of the boat and walking on water before anyone can stop him. Then he notices where he is and splash! He starts sinking.

Was this an experiment designed to test Peter's trust in Jesus? Or was it a test of his ability to concentrate? The Bible reports dozens of times when God tests an individual or a group. Is this one of them? Besides the test of Peter, our readings include the "testing" of Joseph, or so the Psalmist refers to his captivity (Psalm 105:19). Why do we have tests?

Teachers test to find out how much pupils have learned. Athletes test themselves against the clock or the yardage or the radar gun to measure their progress. But God already knows us intimately, knows our strengths and weaknesses. God knows our limits, knows when we are likely to ace the test (as Joseph did) and when we are likely to flunk (as Peter did this time). The tests tell God nothing new.

The tests that life presents, then, are for us, the ones being tested. Sometimes we ace the test and sometimes we sink, but we don't know how well we will do beforehand.

What did Joseph learn from his test? First, that slaves are human too. Next that he could prosper in slavery, eventually becoming Pharaoh's prime minister. Finally, that he loved and could forgive his brothers (giving away next week's first reading). Would he have known all this without a test?

What did Peter learn? First, he learned that when he focuses on Jesus he can walk on water. And he quickly learned that without that focus he can't. Finally, he learned that his comrades in Christ believed Jesus to be the Son of God – though they may not share a vision of what that means.

Prompting Conversations

Mark and Matthew are very different Gospels. Which of the four Gospels is your favorite? Which could just as well be cut from the New Testament for all the attention you pay to it? Thinking about your most and least favorite, how does each portray Jesus? How about his disciples? What about the Jews? Does that help explain how you rank the Gospels? No? Oh well, never mind.

Have you ever engaged in a community project to write your own Gospel? What would be the Good News you would have for today's readers?

Life brings us tests a plenty – we don't need God to throw any new ones our way. Can you relate a time when you were tested, going through some crisis or other? Did the event strengthen you or did it simply make you conscious of your own strengths? How did prayer come into the process? At all? After the fact?



Dennis Haugh has enjoyed working with adult seekers for over 20 years. He aims to engage academic and general audiences for the New Testament. He earned his PhD in Biblical Studies in the University of Denver/Illiff School of Theology joint program. He appreciates any correspondence: dennishaugh2011@gmail.com.

Unless expressly stated otherwise, Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. "Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary" © 2017 St Timothy's Episcopal Church. Weekly postings may be accessed at <http://sttims.net/adulted/journeying-through-the-lectionary/>.