

Former Prophet
2 Samuel 18:5-33

⁵The king gave orders to Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying,
‘Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.’
And all the people heard when the king gave orders
to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

⁶ So the army went out into the field against Israel;
and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim.

⁷The men of Israel were defeated there
by the servants of David,
and the slaughter there was great on that day,
twenty thousand men.

⁸The battle spread over the face of all the country;
and the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword.

⁹ Absalom happened to meet the servants of David.
Absalom was riding on his mule,
and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak.
His head caught fast in the oak,
and he was left hanging between heaven and earth,
while the mule that was under him went on.

¹⁰ A man saw it, and told Joab,
‘I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.’

¹¹ Joab said to the man who told him,
‘What, you saw him!

Why then did you not strike him there to the ground?
I would have been glad
to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt.’

¹² But the man said to Joab,
‘Even if I felt in my hand
the weight of a thousand pieces of silver,
I would not raise my hand against the king’s son;
for in our hearing the king commanded

you and Abishai and Ittai, saying:
For my sake protect the young man Absalom!

¹³ On the other hand,
if I had dealt treacherously against his life
(and there is nothing hidden from the king),
then you yourself would have stood aloof.’

¹⁴ Joab said,
‘I will not waste time like this with you.’
He took three spears in his hand,
and thrust them into the heart of Absalom,
while he was still alive in the oak.

¹⁵ And ten young men,
Joab’s armour-bearers,
surrounded Absalom and struck him,
and killed him.

¹⁶ Then Joab sounded the trumpet,
and the troops came back from pursuing Israel,
for Joab restrained the troops.

¹⁷ They took Absalom,
threw him into a great pit in the forest,
and raised over him a very great heap of stones.

Meanwhile all the Israelites fled to their homes.

¹⁸ Now Absalom in his lifetime
had taken and set up for himself a pillar
that is in the King’s Valley,
for he said,
‘I have no son to keep my name in remembrance’;
he called the pillar by his own name.
It is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.

19 Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said,
'Let me run, and carry tidings to the king
that the LORD has delivered him
from the power of his enemies.'

²⁰Joab said to him,
'You are not to carry tidings today;
you may carry tidings another day,
but today you shall not do so,
because the king's son is dead.'

²¹Then Joab said to a Cushite,
'Go, tell the king what you have seen.'
The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran.

²²Then Ahimaaz son of Zadok said again to Joab,
'Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite.'
And Joab said,

'Why will you run, my son,
seeing that you have no reward for the tidings?'

²³'Come what may,' he said, 'I will run.'
So he said to him, 'Run.'

Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the Plain,
and outran the Cushite.

24 Now David was sitting between the two gates.
The sentinel went up to the roof of the gate by the wall,
and when he looked up, he saw a man running alone.

²⁵The sentinel shouted and told the king.
The king said, 'If he is alone, there are tidings in his mouth.'
He kept coming, and drew near.

²⁶Then the sentinel saw another man running;
and the sentinel called to the gatekeeper and said,
'See, another man running alone!'
The king said, 'He also is bringing tidings.'

²⁷The sentinel said,
'I think the running of the first one
is like the running of Ahimaaz son of Zadok.'

The king said, 'He is a good man,
and comes with good tidings.'

28 Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, 'All is well!'
He prostrated himself before the king
with his face to the ground, and said,
'Blessed be the LORD your God,
who has delivered up the men
who raised their hand against my lord the king.'

²⁹The king said,
'Is it well with the young man Absalom?'
Ahimaaz answered,
'When Joab sent your servant,
I saw a great tumult,
but I do not know what it was.'

³⁰The king said,
'Turn aside, and stand here.'
So he turned aside, and stood still.

31 Then the Cushite came; and the Cushite said,
'Good tidings for my lord the king!
For the LORD has vindicated you this day,
delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you.'

³²The king said to the Cushite,
'Is it well with the young man Absalom?'
The Cushite answered,
'May the enemies of my lord the king,
and all who rise up to do you harm,
be like that young man.'

33 The king was deeply moved,
and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept;
and as he went, he said,
'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!
Would that I had died instead of you,
O Absalom, my son, my son!'

Epistle
Ephesians 4:25-5:2

25 So then, putting away falsehood,
let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours,
for we are members of one another.

26 Be angry but do not sin;
do not let the sun go down on your anger,
27 and do not make room for the devil.

28 Thieves must give up stealing;
rather let them labour
and work honestly
with their own hands,
so as to have something
to share with the needy.

29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths,
but only what is useful for building up,
as there is need,
so that your words
may give grace
to those who hear.

30 And do not grieve
the Holy Spirit of God,
with which you were marked
with a seal for the day of redemption.

31 Put away from you
all bitterness
and wrath
and anger
and wrangling
and slander,
together with all malice,

32 and be kind to one another,
tender-hearted,
forgiving one another,
as God in Christ has forgiven you.

1 Therefore be imitators of God,
as beloved children,
2 and live in love,
as Christ loved us
and gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

*3 But fornication
and impurity of any kind,
or greed,
must not even be mentioned
among you,
as is proper
among saints.*

*4 Entirely out of place
is obscene,
silly,
and vulgar talk;
but instead,
let there be thanksgiving.*

*5 Be sure of this,
that no fornicator
or impure person,
or one who is greedy
(that is, an idolater),
has any inheritance
in the kingdom of Christ
and of God.*

Gospel
John 6:35, 36-40, 41-51

35 Jesus said to them,
'I am the bread of life.
Whoever comes to me
will never be hungry,
and whoever believes in me
will never be thirsty.

*36 But I said to you
that you have seen me
and yet do not believe.*

*37 Everything
that the Father gives me
will come to me,
and anyone who comes to me
I will never drive away;*

*38 for I have come
down from heaven,
not to do my own will,
but the will of him
who sent me.*

*39 And this is
the will of him
who sent me,
that I should lose nothing
of all that he has given me,
but raise it up
on the last day.*

*40 This is indeed the will of my Father,
that all who see the Son
and believe in him
may have eternal life;
and I will raise them up
on the last day.'*

41 Then the Judeans
began to complain about him
because he said,
'I am the bread
that came
down from heaven.'

⁴²They were saying,
'Is not this Jesus,
the son of Joseph,
whose father and mother
we know?

How can he now say,
"I have come
down from heaven"?'

⁴³Jesus answered them,
'Do not complain
among yourselves.

⁴⁴No one can come to me
unless drawn
by the Father
who sent me;
and I will raise
that person up
on the last day.

⁴⁵It is written
in the prophets,
"And they shall all be taught by God."

Everyone who has heard
and learned from the Father
comes to me.

⁴⁶Not that anyone
has seen the Father
except the one
who is from God;
he has seen the Father.

⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you,
whoever believes
has eternal life.

⁴⁸I am the bread of life.

⁴⁹Your ancestors
ate the manna
in the wilderness,
and they died.

⁵⁰This is the bread
that comes
down from heaven,
so that
one may eat of it
and not die.

⁵¹I am the living bread
that came
down from heaven.

Whoever eats
of this bread
will live for ever;
and the bread
that I will give
for the life
of the world
is my flesh.'

Reading the Former Prophet this Week

The lectionary leaps ahead to civil war of succession
Aged David stays home, sending a 3-part army
Absalom the usurper appearing to have the upper hand

For audio and notes on the whole chapter:
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2024/07/2-samuel-18.html>
(better, add the previous chapters about the civil war)

For notes from a 2009 sermon, eerily still timely:
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2009/08/absalom-absalom.html?q=absalom>

The reading seems too long for worship use,
yet short for comprehension of the context –
Which of the nuggets do you pick, panning for gold?

I have empathy for David's bereavements –
losses not only of his heir apparent, expectations,
but also his lame duck status from here on

I used to feel more for his 3 commanders
middle management receiving unclear direction
managing morale and messaging

A week after Emancipation Day,
I don't overlook the Cushite African soldier
Ahimaaz son of Zadok better mentored by Joab
(dare I reference "Hillbilly Elegy" of J.D.Vance?)

Reading the Epistle this Week

The seriatim read-through of Ephesians
Leans into 'paraenetic' or moralistic advice
About behaviours, attitudes, disposition

This stuff delights the therapeutic liberal reader,
appearing to advocate eirenic mindfulness
and to exclude the possibility of righteous anger

I indulge myself by adding 5:3-5 to the lection –
As popular in evangelical circles as the rest is in ours –
The exclusion of the 'other', taboo, shunned

It may be helpful to listen to David Bentley Hart's translation:
Audio and notes for Ephesians 4
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2019/02/thursday-wk-4-ephesians-4.html?q=%22Ephesians+4%22>
Audio and notes for Ephesians 5
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2019/02/friday-wk-4-ephesians-5.html?q=%22Ephesians+5%22>

It might be more helpful
To listen to this texts in different voices
Not just in mine!

Two more weeks of Ephesians in Year B RCL
You may forgive me for ducking it
After taking a stab last Sunday!

I'll listen for my colleagues,
For whom this is more of a 'sweet spot'

Reading the Gospel this Week

This 3rd of 5 weeks on John 6,
Chase further down the rabbit-hole of 'bread of life'
Artos tēs zōēs

I kept (*in italics*) v36-40,
denying any are lost, just many never in
engaging an unfamiliar (to us) inclusion/exclusion fight

The argument resumes with resistance in 'Judean' voices:
Contesting the divine sublime claim of 'I am', 'came down'
Given the human mundane reality of local family

We'll get two more weeks this month
to chase down 'flesh and blood', 'eat and drink'
so stick with our spatial language for now...

What's your operating 'Christology'
the person and work of Jesus
his humanity and divinity?

What's your operating 'soteriology'
About who is saved, from or to what
In what relation to Moses' covenant?

The 4th gospel takes shape late in 1st century CE
The Nicene Creed 325CE – 1700th anniversary soon –
All the ecumenical creeds since...
We may not solve this one...