

Sundays between 6 and 12 November, Ordinary 32 Year A

Returning to the mysteries of Ordinary Time brings back the pattern of Continuous and Related OT Readings. In addition, on this particular Sunday, the Continuous series of OT readings offers two alternatives both for the main OT reading and for the Psalm (or Canticle). Common Worship differs from RCL by not employing the *Continuous* OT readings at all.

OT Continuous

Josh 24: 1-3a, 14-25

This passage includes both the beginning and the climax of Joshua's farewell speech to the Children of Israel. It is delivered to the elders and the heads of families of the people. The opening section is a rehearsal of the Word of the Lord in which God's role as the One who has brought this people into being by God's call to Abraham, the covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the great deliverance from Egypt.

The final section of the speech is a call for decision. Joshua invites the people to join him in unswerving loyalty to God. Perhaps the key phrase is "choose whom you will serve", if your decision is not to serve the Lord. If the people will not follow Joshua's recommendation, the alternative is not to follow no god at all. Such a position is inconceivable. They must therefore choose which god they will follow from among the great variety available to them. They must decide where their loyalties lie. Neutrality is not an option.

But (vv19-25) they must understand that an oath of loyalty to the Lord, once it has been made, cannot be revoked explicitly nor can it be revoked implicitly by neglect. It is not easy to interpret this absolutist claim in terms other than absolute divine decree backed by sovereign power – which is, of course, how it has always been interpreted. Is it any more than an indirect reference to absolute character of God's claim upon us his people?

Ps 78: 1-7

The opening verses of this psalm set out the way in which the heritage of God's people is to be kept alive and vibrant: each generation is to teach the tradition to the next generation. This history may have its dark side (v2) but it is a glorious one (v4).

OT Related

Wisdom of Solomon 6: 12-16

The Wisdom Tradition in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha is basically one of proverbial and high-minded commonsense. But the personification of Wisdom has given rise to a strong link between Wisdom and the Word of God (i.e. Jesus). Here Wisdom is eager to be known, eager to share her blessings with those who seek her diligently.

Or Amos 5:18-24

As we approach Advent Sunday the lectionary reminds us that, like marriage, this event is by no means to be taken in hand lightly. Why? Because it will be a day when the true qualities of everything we do will be revealed. For many that will be a moment of profound shock – like running away from a lion only to be confronted by an equally savage foe.

Amos lays out the reasons underlying this threatening general oracle: people have been turning their acts of sacrifice and worship into lavish and ostentatious formalities, yet without the deep sincerity of heart that must accompany them. Contrary to what some Christians have believed, the religion of Old Testament times – as expressed by some of its nobler figures – demanded complete integrity, genuine repentance for sin; mere formal observance was by no means sufficient.

Canticle: Wisdom of Solomon 6: 17-20

Continuing the theme of the earlier reading from the book of Wisdom, we see here how important it is that wisdom should be sought with energy and commitment, wholehearted attention and devotion. The desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom. These verses seem to suggest that we can choose the direction of our desires – and the best direction for our desires is the longing for wisdom. It is close to Jesus' own words: blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Or Ps 70

The psalmist's prayer here arises from a sense of desperation. It has been suggested that it is rooted in the experiences of David when defending Saul's territory from the Philistines, despite Saul's paranoid behaviour towards him. David was often victorious, but there was hardship and there were moments of terror, when a few minutes' rest were all that could be risked.

Epistle 1 Th 4:13-18

In this – perhaps the earliest of Paul's letters – we see the realisation dawning that the return of Jesus is not going to be very soon. This demands a challenging adjustment to the mindset of the Thessalonian church. The concern here, it must be emphasised, is not quite what it appears to be – setting out a timetable of events at the end of time. Rather it is a very practical pastoral concern for families desperately anxious about the destiny of their dead relatives. The wording of verse 15 suggests that the main source of concern was the question about those who have “fallen asleep in the Lord” – i.e. who have died. When the Lord does come, will the living go directly to meet him in glory? What will happen to those who are “asleep”? Paul's teaching here is that the dead will first be summoned from their graves, then they will be joined by the living.

Gospel Matt 25: 1-13

This story, commonly referred to as the story of the wise and foolish virgins, emphasizes the supreme importance of preparedness in relation to the coming of the bridegroom (i.e., the coming of Jesus). The somewhat harsh tone of verse 12 may simply be a matter of increasing the stress on that central point of readiness. It should not be compared with a verse like John 6:37 in such a way as to pit one verse against another. This, after all, is a parable, and its point is to make this one central point: believers are to be ready for the coming of the Lord.