

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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2 Samuel 7:1-14a

NRSV

David is now installed as king in Jerusalem. This passage makes little sense until we realize that the word “house” (consistently *bayith* in Hebrew) has three different meanings here: (1) palace, (2) temple, and (3) dynasty (or royal *house*). After various wars, most recently with the coastal people, the Philistines, David consults his court prophet, Nathan: since I now have a palace, I think the time has come to build a temple for the Ark. Nathan agrees.

But that night, God speaks to Nathan (v. 4): tell David that he is not the one to build a temple for me. Ever since the Exodus I have not had one (v. 6), and have never asked for one (v. 7). (“Cedar” was the best building material at the time.) God tells Nathan to give David a personal assurance (vv. 8-9): God has raised him from shepherd boy to king, has always been with him wherever he went (local gods were confined to one place on earth), and has defeated all his enemies. God will make him great. God will also (vv. 10-11) give the people of Israel, his people, a settled life, peace and security – which they have lacked until now. God tells David (v. 11) that he will make him founder of a dynasty, a royal “house”; both it and David’s kingdom will be God’s for ever.

Psalms 89:20-37

NRSV

Overall, a king, on behalf of the people, laments some disaster and blames God for it, but our portion of the psalm recalls what God “spoke in a vision” (v. 19) to Nathan and/or David. (Note the links with our reading from 2 Samuel.) God has “anointed” (v. 20) David as his earthly vice-regent: he will not be outwitted or humbled by any deviant from God’s ways (v. 22). God will be constant in his love for him (v. 24); through God, David will be victorious (“his horn shall be exalted”); he will rule from the Mediterranean (“the sea”, v. 25) to the Tigris and Euphrates “rivers”. David will acknowledge God as Father, and as continual source of restoration from sin (v. 26). God will adopt him (“the firstborn”, v. 27): he will be closer to God than any other king. God forsook Saul for his evil ways, but his “covenant” (v. 28) with David will continue whatever David does. He and his line (“children”, v. 30) will be subject to divine law as his subjects are; if they go against God, they will be *punished* (v. 32); even so such violations will not end the dynasty (vv. 33-34). David’s line will be seen to endure (“witness”, v. 37) and will continue “forever” – as the “moon” does.

Ephesians 2:11-22

NRSV

The author has reminded his readers that we have our saving faith through God’s gift – of our faith and of his love for us. Through our faith, we realize that God’s gift exists. Being Christ’s, we are to do good works. He now addresses himself to

those who are “Gentiles by birth” (v. 11). He reminds his non-Jewish readers that they were, at one time, “without Christ” (v. 12), without hope of union with God, not being parties to God’s pacts with Israel. They had no “hope” of union with God, and were “without God”, with no true knowledge of him. “But now” (v. 13) they, once “far off”, distant from God’s ways, have been brought hope through the cross (“the blood of Christ”). Christ is what unifies Gentiles and Jews; he has made us all *one group*; he has eliminated the enmity between us. (Jews were not permitted to have contact with Gentiles, for fear of being defiled ritually.) Cultural differences are no longer relevant – what matters is that we are “one new humanity” (v. 15): the division is gone. Christ has brought the two groups together “in one body” (v. 16, the Church). His message was (and is) one of “peace” (v. 17) – to Gentiles (“far off”) and to Jews (“near”). We both come into his presence (“access”, v. 18) through Christ, participating in the action of the Holy Spirit, “to the Father”. So we are all fellow members of God’s heavenly and earthly community (“saints”, v. 19). (A “household” included all: parents, children and slaves.) Christ started this “household”; he is the “cornerstone” (v. 20) of it. Those who preceded us, “apostles and [Christian] prophets”, laid the foundation; it is a sacred “structure” (v. 21), edifice, “temple”, the Church, continually growing spiritually.

Mark 6:30-34,53-56

NRSV

In vv. 7-13, Jesus has sent out the disciples, giving them authority over evil forces in people. The twelve have “proclaimed that all should repent” of their deviations from God’s ways; they have “anointed with oil many who were sick” and have cured them. After diverting to the story of John the Baptist’s death (an example of what discipleship may cost), Mark returns to the main story.

Jesus *debriefs* the disciples (v. 30). In 3:20, Jesus has no time to eat; here (v. 32) neither do the disciples: such is Jesus’ popularity as healer and wonder-worker. Note Mark’s emphasis on the crowd: many recognize them (vv. 33, 55), hurry to meet them as they disembark, are “like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34, aimless, leaderless); they rush here and there bringing the sick; they beg Jesus (v. 56). He has compassion on them, begins to teach them, and heals the sick.

In vv. 35-44, Jesus feeds five thousand people in this “deserted place” (v. 36, literally *desert*). Jesus says to the disciples, “You give them something to eat”. He continues to train them to carry out his mission, but they take what he says literally. This event recalls God’s feeding his people in the wilderness; it points forward to their expectation of life in God’s kingdom: a banquet at which the Messiah will preside. In vv. 45-52, Jesus walks on water, further demonstrating his divine power – here over unruly seas.

The fringes on Jesus’ cloak (v. 56) show that he obeys God’s commandments. In touching his cloak, the sick make him ritually unclean, but those who touch him are “healed”, made well – and have their sins forgiven. In the following verses, Mark tells us that the religious authorities are more concerned with legalistic ritual purity than with the needs of the common people.

