

Divergence on the Lectionary - Proper 15, Year B (track one)

First Reading

1 Kings 2:10–12, 3:3–14

Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

...

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” (ESV)

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:15–20 (verse 20 added in italics to finish the sentence)

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.* (ESV)

Gospel Text

John 6:51–58 (verse 59 added to complete that section of the chapter)

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. (ESV)

Comments and Questions for Discussion

First Reading

Our text from 1 Kings appointed for this week begins a series of readings that are related in some form or fashion to King Solomon. Unlike the texts concerning David, we are not given a series of readings that describe the arc of Solomon’s reign. Instead, we read this week of his request for a “listening heart” and next week of his consecration of the Temple. After that we will hear readings from texts attributed to Solomon, the Song of Solomon and Proverbs.

Were we to read only the assigned lectionary texts concerning David’s son, we would come away with an image of the king that isn’t shared by the author of 1 Kings. That is,

the lectionary texts are too uniformly positive, while the Bible itself offers us a very conflicted image of the Solomon.

Even our reading for this week is unfortunate in all that it omits. We skip from David's death directly to Solomon's request for a listening heart, leaving aside the ambivalence toward Solomon that characterizes the omitted verses. This doesn't even take into account David's dying words to his son in chapter one, which consist of wildly contrasting pious platitudes and almost bloodthirsty demands for vengeance. Chapter two is a blood-soaked story of the consolidation of Solomon's rule which seems to continue the role of the sword in David's house to me.

The early chapters of 1 Kings are largely, but not uniformly positive towards King Solomon. Our reading this week is framed by two sacrifices. (Our lectionary choosers decided to leave the second one off for some reason.) In the first there is sacrifice at Gibeon. In the second (after the dream) it is in Jerusalem. This parallels the movement of worship from the high places (in verse 2, but this is positive because there is no Temple yet) to the Temple (which we'll read about next week). While this is a positive thing it also prefigures Solomon's worship on the high places in chapter 11 (which is negative, because it is pagan, not Yahweh worship). So even here at the beginning the author of 1 Kings foreshadows Solomon's fall.

The story of Solomon's request for wisdom, then, needs to be read as only part of the image of the king that the author of 1 Kings wishes to paint. Solomon was widely praised for this discernment, but even here at the beginning of his reign, we see the first cracks in the foundation of his palace.

Second Reading

As with last week, Paul continues here to speak to the Gentile portion of the congregation in Ephesus, contrasting the behaviors of those who do not know Christ with those who do. Do not walk as the unwise, do not be foolish, do not be drunk. He contrasts those negative admonitions with walking as the wise, understanding the will of the Lord, and being filled *in* the Spirit.

And that's what I'd like to dwell on this week. Paul tells the Ephesians to be filled *in* the Spirit, not *with* or *by* the Spirit, as most translations have it. Having studied this text more closely than ever before, I find that the whole modern notion of being "spirit-filled" has shifted for me. Instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul says that those who are *in* the Spirit are filled. But by what? Earlier in the letter he speaks of Christ who fills all things. He also encourages the Ephesians to be "filled with the love of Christ."

It seems that for Paul, those whom we have sometimes described as “Spirit-filled” are not those who are full of the Spirit, but those who are *in* the Spirit and are filled *by* the Spirit with Christ Himself, with the love of Christ. So, yes, I still long to be “Spirit-filled,” but it means something new to me now.

It is no small thing to me that Paul parallels this with being drunk with wine. There have been times in my life when I was so overcome *in* the Spirit that I couldn't stand, the joy was so exquisite. It was sometimes accompanied by laughter that must have sounded drunken to those who didn't understand. (The Day of Pentecost!) But now I grasp that it was not the in-filling of the Spirit Itself that inspired those moments, but rather, it was the flood of Christ Himself, of His Love, His Joy, that made my knees weak.

This may seem a small thing to you, but to me, in my walk with Jesus, it's a significant shift.

Gospel Text

Over the last two weeks, I've shared with you my conviction that Jesus' "Bread of Life" speech in chapter six of John's Gospel is original to Jesus and not the creation of the Fourth Evangelist. I have also said that for this reason I don't think this "Eucharistic Discourse" is a reflection of early Christian practice, but something else that Jesus was trying to impart.

This week I have a better grasp on just what that is. I've been reading about early Christian eucharistic practice and found an article (I'll link it below, as I can't possibly do it justice here) that helps in two significant ways. First, the author makes very plain that early Christian meals did not include our eucharistic imagery and language until centuries after John (and the synoptics) was written. For this reason alone it simply can no longer be said that John 6 is a reflection of the community's practice. It could not have been.

But the really new thing for me in this article is the explanation of the way that eating of flesh and blood function *metaphorically*, not ritually or eucharistically. Basically (and I do the author, Jan Heilmann, a grave disservice here by abbreviating so) eating and drinking of Jesus flesh and blood is a metaphor for receiving/believing His teaching. This isn't about the eucharist at all, it's about accepting, consuming His *words*. (What does Peter say soon? "You have the words of eternal life.")

One parallel that Heilmann points out is from Jeremiah, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart..." (Jer. 15:16)

Heilmann makes little of the setting of our passage this week, but it seems to support a part of his assertion. That is, this event happens in the context of the Passover. While he does explain that Jesus' "flesh," *sarx*, does not function as an image of the meat of the Passover Lamb, (and so the discourse is not a Passover image, either) I don't think that the meal imagery of the time of the Passover should be discounted. Jesus isn't aiming for the Passover, or the Eucharist, but the image of eating/drinking as a metaphor for receiving the truth that He brings.

I've talked before about how offensive this language is. Heilmann helped me understand that *sarx* generally refers to *living* flesh, which makes it all the more unpalatable. But it is part of the self-understanding of the Johannine community that much of what Jesus says and does are offensive to those who have not (yet! See last week) received Him. Chapter six of the Fourth Gospel becomes clearer and clearer to me as we read it together.

Oh, and here's the [LINK](#) to that article.