



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 50.1-8, 22-23 [Worship]

1 The mighty one, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. 3 Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all

around him. 4 He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: 5 "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!" 6

The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah

7 "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. 8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me.

22 "Mark this, then, you who forget God, or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver. 23 Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God."

Consider: [Words]

Summer time may be when "the livin' is easy" for a lot of folk. Even in the church year, summer is a pause between high holy days. So what are these ... low holy days? The lectionary readings suggest it's a time for the church to rethink and reconsider its identity and vocation for the daily practice of emancipated obedience.

Christians are now placed in a society where the substance of every doctrinal commitment is both valuable and placed deeply in question. Thus, concerning the environment, is the world God's creation? Is the greed around healthcare a form of idolatry? Is the vulnerable transformative power of Jesus still salvific? Is there an end that will exhibit God's intransigent love for the world? Is there a call to turn the world upside down? Is there a wind blowing that could manifest "the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body"?

The texts will fuel our thought about these big questions that touch down so specifically in our society. I am struck by how these old texts are alarmingly contemporary. The livin' may be easy, but the deciding

and the acting are not easy, never were. They are, however, joyous in a way the old world can never permit or acknowledge. The undercurrent of the texts is the gifted liberty that comes from following.

It is easy enough, given modern affluence, to imagine that "it doesn't get any better than this." It's tempting, in our complacency, to judge that things will continue as they are. It is persuasive, in our despair, to conclude that the world is a closed system with no gifts yet to be given.

Against those ready seductions of affluence, complacency, or despair, the gospel news is that God can and *does* enact newness in the world. Indeed it is peculiarly God's work to make new when it is thought not possible. Gospel folk are alert to the newness from God that is always about to break in.

The gospel reading summons to readiness like a slave who alertly awaits the return of the master. The index of "hoppers" in Hebrews 11 takes as its champion father Abraham. Three times in these verses it is "by faith" (verses 8, 9, 11). In trust Abraham traveled, lived in a foreign land, and bore a son.

"Sojourners" in the gospel refuse both complacency and despair. We may be glad that the old communities of Israel and church left us these texts. Now they are ours to study and pray over. —Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture]

Hebrews 11.9-21

9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old--and Sarah herself was barren--because he considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore." 13 All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, 14 for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.