



still waters

home church studies

Psalm 72.1-7, 18-19 [Worship]

1 Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. 2 May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. 3 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. 4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. 5 May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. 6 May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. 7 In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

18 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. 19 Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

Consider:

[Words]

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptizer culminates with the endorsement of heaven, "This is my son, the Beloved." The sentence, from Psalm 2:7, offers approval of a king of the Davidic line. The quote in Matthew affirms God's blessing for the coming rule of Jesus.

The Old Testament texts focus on the nature of proper kingship and anticipate the way in which Jesus will be king. Psalm 72 gives a mandate to the Davidic king to practice economic justice toward the poor and needy, a practice that will ensure the longevity of the dynasty. The poetic reading of Isaiah 11 expresses a longing for the true king who will come—eventually—and will be characterized by wisdom and devotion to God's purposes (verses 2-3), with a resolve to practice equity and faithfulness to the poor. Isaiah's poem anticipates that good governance will extend to the well-being of all creation (verses 6-9). The practice of justice has immediate impact on the environment and its health and wholeness.

The reading from Romans connects the rule of Jesus to the old promises made to father Abraham in the book of Genesis (Genesis 12:3). The series of quotes from the Old Testament in Romans 15 all focus on the Gentiles, that is, on welcome to "the other" amid the people of God. Paul's theology is an alternative to narrow exclusivism that fears and rejects "the other."

Jesus is about the mobilization of public power for the common good, as these readings attest. John warns his listeners that their sense of entitlement as God's special people counts for nothing, as a new beginning has come into the world. What counts is the "good fruit" of a viable society (Matthew 3:10). Any other claim is phony and can only end badly.

—Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture] Matthew 3.1-12

1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 3 This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" 4 Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9 Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Reread Romans 15:4-13