

A reading from the book of the prophet Zephaniah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land,
who do his commands;
seek righteousness, seek humility;
perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath.
For I will leave in the midst of you
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord –
the remnant of Israel;
they shall do no wrong and utter no lies,
nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths.
Then they will pasture and lie down,
and no one shall make them afraid.

Zephaniah = ZEF-un-NIGH-uh

wrath = ROARTH

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters:
not many of you were wise by human standards,
not many were powerful,
not many were of noble birth.
But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise;
God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;
God chose what is low and despised in the world,
things that are not,
to reduce to nothing things that are,
so that no one might boast in the presence of God.
God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus,
who became for us wisdom from God,
and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,
in order that, as it is written,
“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 04

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain;
and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.
Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward is great in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13 RCL: Micah 6:1-8

In the Christian Church, Zephaniah has always been one of the least known and least used Old Testament prophets. This was so from the beginning, for he is cited (Zeph 1:3) only once in the New Testament (Matt 13:41). He prophesied during the reign of the reforming king Josiah and was therefore roughly contemporary with Jeremiah. But he does not seem to have been interested in Josiah's reform. He was filled with a sense of impending doom - he had much to say about the Day of the Lord, and for him, as for Amos, this day would be a day of darkness and not light, a Day of Judgment for Israel.

In view of this impending judgment, Zephaniah in today's passage urges Israel to "seek righteousness, see humility," for only righteous and humble people will escape that day. Zephaniah's single contribution to Old Testament religious thought was his emphasis on God's concern for 'anawim, the "poor," an idea that will be taken up in the beatitude in today's gospel.

Note that this reading is a composite one, bringing together two passages separated by more than a whole chapter. This combination of texts is wholly justified, since both passages advocate humility as the only ground of security on the Day of the Lord.

RCL's reading of Micah starts with a *rîb* (lawsuit) between Yahweh and Israel, a typical prophetic genre. God had brought Israel out of Egypt, but she has been unfaithful. Then in verses 6-8 the prophet responds with a classic summary of God's requirements: not sacrifices, but justice, mercy, and humility. We should bear in mind the Hebraic way of making the point, "not this, but that" meaning that neither is excluded, but that "this must be accompanied by that, otherwise it will be worthless."

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 RCL: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Last week we saw how Paul wrote to the Corinthians in reply to, among other things, the verbal information brought to him by Chloe's people about the divisions among the congregation. As usual, Paul goes to the theological root of the matter. The trouble with Corinthians was that they were too sure of themselves. They boasted about their wisdom. They believed, like the later Gnostics, that through their initiation into Christ they have been made partakers of a heavenly wisdom. They were already on cloud nine! They thought themselves superior to other people who had not had this experience, and hence their cliquishness, which Paul was so concerned about in last week's reading.

In today's passage Paul seeks to "take them down a peg or two." They think themselves wise and strong, whereas actually they belong to what the outside world would regard as the dregs of society: "not many wise according to worldly standards, not many powerful, not many of noble birth." They have nothing to boast about in themselves before God. It is not their own spiritual endowments, achievements, or experiences that the ground of

their salvation, but only god's saving act in Jesus Christ, a fact that should humble them. If they must "glory," all they can glory in is the Lord - the act of God in Christ.

There is a remarkable parallel here to the way in which Paul dealt with the Judaizers in Galatians. The Judaizers sought salvation through the Jewish Law, while the Corinthians believed that they were saved through their own wisdom. In each instance Paul sees the same basic fault. Each party tries to find something in themselves to boast about, some endowment or qualification to give them security vis-à-vis God. Being a Christian, however, means surrendering all this boasting, of whatever kind. For Paul, boasting is the supreme expression of human sinfulness. Thus, the gospel gets under the skin of both Jew and Greek, the religious and the irreligious, for both are exposed to the same temptation.

The extra verses RCL (18-25) place the discussion of the Corinthians' lack of human wisdom in its theological context, indicated also in the verse of the reading. The wisdom of this world is contrasted with divine wisdom, which foolishness to the world, namely the kerygma of the Cross, while paradoxically the Cross is the wisdom and power of God.

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12a

The Beatitudes form the opening of the "Great Sermon." In Matthew, it is the Sermon on the Mount; in Luke, the Sermon on the Plain. Matthew's reason for choosing this location is that he understands the teaching of the sermon as the new Law, corresponding to the old Law given on Mount Sinai, and for him Jesus is the second Moses, the giver of the new law.

Each beatitude consists of two parts. The first part describes the humiliation of the present, the second the glory to come. The Beatitudes are not addressed to all people indiscriminately, but to the disciples, to those who have left all to follow Jesus. Note that in Luke the Beatitudes are all in the second person plural. Here Luke is probably original, for the "you" style has survived in the last of Matthew's beatitudes. So Jesus is addressing those who have left all to follow him. They are the ones who realize that spiritually they are the have-nots, who have no righteousness of their own and therefore hunger and thirst for (God's) righteousness.

The second group of beatitudes is more activistic. It is the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers who are pronounced blessed. Faith, if it is genuine, works through love, as Paul put it. It is those who combine both the passive and the active sides of a true relation to God who are pronounced already here and now to be blessed and who are promised future participation in the kingdom of God.

It has often been observed that the Beatitudes describe the life of Christ himself. He was all the things and did all the things that Beatitudes enumerate. Ad that brought him to the Cross, and beyond that to his Resurrection.

Reginald Fuller