

## Lent 4

<i>Mattins</i>	Genesis 43
<i>Introit</i>	Psalm 46
<i>Epistle</i>	Galatians 4:21-31
<i>Gospel</i>	John 6:1-14
<i>Evensong</i>	Genesis 45

### EPISTLE AND GOSPEL

Although the Prayer Book calls this “the Fourth Sunday in Lent,” various colloquial names have attached to it. These include “Mothering Sunday” (from the epistle) and “Refreshment Sunday” (from the gospel). In the propers for today there is a marked shift in tone.

In each of the last three Sundays, the gospel has presented Jesus in conflict with evil spiritual powers. Now the crisis is human need, specifically the hunger of the five thousand. This gospel and the following one will present Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies and longings of the Old Testament.

Similarly, for the last two Sundays, the epistle has presented a contrast between the way pagans live and the way Christians should live. Now there is a shift to a different contrast—between the slavery of the Jerusalem below and the freedom of the Jerusalem above. That contrast will continue in the next week’s epistle, where the imperfection of the blood of bulls and goats is contrasted with the sacrifice of Jesus.

In other words, where the epistles and gospels for Lent 1-3 have emphasized the contrast between good and evil, and called for vigilance and holiness; now the epistles and gospels are shifting toward anticipation of Good Friday and Easter, and contrasting the old covenant and the new, and declaring the freedom and forgiveness of the children of God.

The epistle is St. Paul’s famous allegory of the two Jerusalems, and the spiritual lesson it concludes with is freedom grounded in being God’s

children. This is the goal of the incarnation. (On this point, compare the gospel for Christmas Day.)

The gospel is the feeding of the five thousand. But if this is your first year following the 1662 lectionary, you are in for a surprise. On three different Sundays in the year, the gospel is an account of the feeding of the multitude (Lent 4, Trinity 7, Sunday next before Advent). Most striking of all, on two of these Sundays it is the very same account, namely the feeding of the five thousand in John 6. Why?

Part of the answer lies in a textual difference. On the Sunday next before Advent, the reading starts with verse 5. Without any other framing for the miracle, the interpretation is given by the final words of the reading: “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” That point aligns with the day’s reading for the epistle, and together they present Jesus as the coming king and prophet, a perfect preparation for Advent.

But on Lent 4, the gospel includes the first four verses of John 6. Those verses give the miracle a Passover framing: “And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.” At first that may seem like an odd aside, but it signals how to think about the Lord’s provision in this miracle: just as in the Exodus, God provides for his people. It also signals the shift into the second half of Lent: the ascent to Jerusalem for the Passover, and for the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Finally, these four framing verses also underscore the call of discipleship. They note that the crowd followed Jesus because of the miracles he did. That observation not only fits the flow of the Gospel of John, but it also fits the sequence of the gospels in the church year. The gospels for Lent 2 and Lent 3 have Jesus performing miracles; the gospel for Lent 4 asks if we are here for the miracles.

The introit describes the security and the joy of the “city of God” (Psalm 46:4), the Jerusalem above in the epistle.

## PROPER LESSONS

The Sunday first lessons are Genesis 43 and 45. Read in sequence with the previous Sunday's first lessons, these chapters give the dramatic resolution to the story of Joseph and his brothers. The theme of slavery and freedom dominates the Joseph story, including a reversal of expectations. Joseph's brothers, ostensibly free, are subject to him. Joseph, the former slave, is now a ruler. In this way Joseph is a type of Christ (Philippians 2:6-8, in the epistle for the Sunday next before Easter).

The connection between the Sunday first lessons and the gospel is striking, as Joseph and Jesus satisfy the hunger of the people. Across all of these readings—the epistle, the gospel, and the Sunday first lessons—we see the incredible bounty and rich and provision of God. That, too, is a Lenten theme, though it is sometimes easy to miss. Remember the gospel for Lent I, in which Jesus fasts for forty days, yet the narrative ends with a feast: “behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

## HYMNS

<i>Mattins 1</i>	Be still my soul
<i>Epistle</i>	Jerusalem the golden
<i>Gospel</i>	O Bread of Life from heaven
<i>Evensong 1</i>	God moves in a mysterious way