

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, July 19, 2009

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

### **Vacations are Biblical**

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#### The Lectionary Readings for the week:

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

Psalm 89:20-37

Ephesians 2:11-22

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

“Pack my bags. I’m going on a guilt TRIP.” When I recently cancelled my eagerly anticipated and much-needed vacation to Grand Cayman because of my back surgery, an employee who works for me said, “You haven’t taken a vacation in the SEVEN YEARS I have worked for you.” I was shocked because it only seemed like twenty years. Even dumb mules get Saturday and Sunday off. No one can MAKE you take a vacation. It is a gift we give ourselves. Even the indifferent military calls it “leave”. Vacation comes from the same root word as “vacate” so, if you don’t leave home and routine activities, YOU HAVE NOT TAKEN A VACATION. Distance is not the key issue. There is no such thing as a “working vacation” or a “stay-cation”. Time in the hospital or convalescing is to a vacation what prison time is to freedom. Is it biblical to “take a vacation”? I’m not “proof-texting” the subject as some might. I don’t choose the scriptures each week for discussion. These just happened to come up this week. Today in America, suicide is a crime while working one’s self to death is “socially acceptable”? A coma is the “mind’s vacation”. A heart attack is nature’s way of saying “slow down”. Even the twenty-third psalm talks about God’s MAKING us lie down in green pastures. We either spend time on vacation or in an I.C.U. That is not a good choice. Enjoy your time AWAY. Don’t worry. All the headaches and problems will still be waiting when you come home but, you may be better able to face them. If we “burn the candle at both ends”, we end up with a “burnt wick” and nothing else. Enjoy this discussion before you VACATE.

#### **2 Samuel 7:1-14a**

***When David, the king, was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."***

***But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and***

***a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.***

No one understands frequent moves more than military families. My family moved every time the rent came due. I changed schools five or six times in the first grade. Nathan said that the Israelites should settle down and “put down roots” in the Promised Land. From the time of the commandment to build the Ark of the Covenant, the “presence of the Lord” had dwelled in a “tent” called the Tabernacle. Nathan explained to David that God had not asked for a “house of cedar” or a fancy building. David felt guilty because his “digs” were palatial but God “lived” in a tent. Apparently, some today have not learned that God does not live in buildings. Fancy, expensive, “showy” and “pretentious” buildings are no more “Godly” than tents or cedar tabernacles. ALL of the earth is the Lord’s. Of course, we would not have air conditioning and running water or sound systems without stone “buildings”. People who claim to want to “return to Biblical forms of worship” seem to overlook some of the earthier aspects of Old Testament and New Testament worship practices. Abraham “worshipped” outdoors. Early Christians “worshipped” in private homes with kitchens. Robert Schuler’s “Crystal Cathedral” in Los Angeles started in a defunct drive-in theater. Christ the Redeemer Church began in a purple skating rink. The “Austin Community Church” recently made national news when they began meeting in a barroom and inviting dogs to their services. Christianity began on a rocky crag outside the city gates of Jerusalem where Christ was crucified between convicted criminals and laid in a borrowed tomb. The important point is that Christ VACATED the tomb. What is written on the sign on a “place of worship” is not nearly as important as the “sign” that is written on the hearts of the people in the pews. Temple Judaism was smelly, bloody and loud as the animal sacrifices were slaughtered by the priest wearing aprons. The Lord TOLD Nathan to TELL David that he would not be able to build the Temple. David’s “offspring” would be allowed to build a “house” in the capitol city, Jerusalem. The majority of the

Jews did not live IN Jerusalem. The people were commanded to visit the Temple at certain times during each year so they had to “vacate” their homes and routines to travel to the Temple and worship. God made the people settle in one place and Solomon built the Temple in the “center” of their homeland. (Why was it called “The City of David” and not “The City of God”?) Why didn’t God tell David personally? Was the prediction accurate? Why is Israel being beset by encircling enemies today if the prediction was accurate? IF God lived in the Temple, what about the rest of the world? Why was it not prejudicial for the Israelites to “keep God in a box”? If God lived in the “tent” during the days of David and was moved into the palatial Temple by Solomon, where is God today and when did God “vacate”? We have become “church building worshippers” because WE think God is only encountered in some “church building” edifice? God is both “omnipresent” and “omniscient” or He is not. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to be “God with us”. We are free to worship our God anytime and anywhere WE ARE because God is continually “with us”. The purpose for “gathering to worship” as a community (same root as “communion”) is to build a relationship with EACH OTHER as the “family of God”. If the only time we pray, encounter each other or praise God is on Sunday morning in some manmade edifice, we CHEAT ourselves and deny the presence of God in our DAILY LIVES. David was not allowed to build the Temple but, he was allowed to prepare the way for Solomon to build the Temple. The message of the scripture seems to be “You may not build the building but you can prepare for those who come after you to build it.” I can sense the smiles on the faces of every “building committee member” in the audience. Don’t get me wrong. Buildings are great when they are built for the purpose of ministry. Tying up a bunch of money in buildings that keep us from “doing” ministry is ill-advised and not consistent with Christ’s teachings to “GO into all the world”. Do we build our “church houses” expecting the lost to “come to us” or do we have an attitude of “going where the sinners are”? Every member of Christ the Redeemer Church is a minister with a unique “outreach” to those in their daily lives. What is your “ministry” and do you understand this is your purpose in life? Titles do not make a “minister”. Doing “ministry” bestows the title from God as we accept His guidance and support as we worship, parent, earn a living and while on vacation. Unless we are willing to “vacate” our buildings and GO where we are needed, we cannot experience the joy of serving people where THEY ARE. It may be as close as “across the street” or “around the world” but GO we must. God will already BE wherever we GO. That’s His promise.

### **Psalm 89:20-37**

**20**

***"I have found David my servant; \*  
with my holy oil have I anointed him.***

**21**

***My hand will hold him fast \****

22 ***and my arm will make him strong.***

23 ***No enemy shall deceive him, \*  
nor any wicked man bring him down.***

24 ***I will crush his foes before him \*  
and strike down those who hate him.***

25 ***My faithfulness and love shall be with him, \*  
and he shall be victorious through my Name.***

26 ***I shall make his dominion extend \*  
from the Great Sea to the River.***

27 ***He will say to me, 'You are my Father, \*  
my God, and the rock of my salvation.'***

28 ***I will make him my firstborn \*  
and higher than the kings of the earth.***

29 ***I will keep my love for him for ever, \*  
and my covenant will stand firm for him.***

30 ***I will establish his line for ever \*  
and his throne as the days of heaven."***

31 ***"If his children forsake my law \*  
and do not walk according to my judgments;***

32 ***If they break my statutes \*  
and do not keep my commandments;***

33 ***I will punish their transgressions with a rod \*  
and their iniquities with the lash;***

34 ***But I will not take my love from him, \*  
nor let my faithfulness prove false.***

35 ***I will not break my covenant, \*  
nor change what has gone out of my lips.***

35 ***Once for all I have sworn by my holiness: \*  
'I will not lie to David.***

36

*His line shall endure for ever \*  
and his throne as the sun before me;*

37

*It shall stand fast for evermore like the moon, \*  
the abiding witness in the sky.' "*

If David was so conversant and intimate with God, why did Nathan have to give the news to David instead of David's hearing it directly from God? These things trouble me when I read the scriptures. Does it mean that I must rely on someone to "tell me God's will"? Does God speak directly to me? How can I know if it's God or my own mind? Read the psalm again and you tell me if the predicted events and outcomes actually happened. David was expressing his FAITH in the FAITHFULNESS of God to keep his promises. Are there "conditions" on God's love? Why, then, do we speak of God's "unconditional love"? Vacation does not mean "taking leave of one's senses". Only you and I can put "limits" on God's love. The answer to this question of the existence of the "unconditional love of God" will greatly determine how we relate to each other, especially on VACATION. Invite God on your vacation or he will stow away and be there when you need Him.

### **Ephesians 2:11-22**

***Remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" -- a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands-- remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.***

In the ancient world, circumcision was practiced by the Egyptians, the Israelites and other peoples. What was the purpose of physical circumcision? Primarily it

was performed for hygiene purposes. That reminds me of a JOKE: During the Six Day War, the Israeli Defense Force issued a “survival kit” to their pilots. It contained a gun, rations and a snap-on foreskin. Early Christians were primarily Jews by tradition and genetics. Some insisted that converted Gentiles undergo circumcision to comply with Jewish traditions prior to their “becoming Christians”. Paul addressed this apparent controversy among some of the Gentile Ephesians. Who, besides God, is capable of “circumcising our hearts”? I don’t think I have seen a Blue Cross code for that surgery so it probably does not exist. What Paul considered important was the attitude of “redemption” by which both circumcised and uncircumcised believers were “bought back” from sins. Both groups were asked to “vacate” their pasts and to become “new creatures” whether physically circumcised or “circumcised of the heart”. Have I circumcised my heart? What does that mean? Circumcision was a rite practiced to “identify the male child as belonging to God’s Israelite people”. How have I been “marked as having been redeemed by God”? Could people look at me and see that I have been physically changed by the “circumcision of my heart”? Physical circumcision is obvious. “Circumcision of the heart” should be as obvious. Again, what changes have I undergone as I have obeyed God’s will for my life? Have I “vacated” my past? Am I now living “closer to God” as I have “vacated” my past? God says, “VACATE the past. Live again. You have a second chance. You have been redeemed. Act like you believe it.”

### **Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

***The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come AWAY to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.***

***When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.***

Readers should remember that I am “preaching to MYSELF”. Christians are “big” on emulating Christ in everything except “taking time away”. In all the numerous “sermons” that I have heard in my life, I do not recall the subject ever being discussed as a tenet of Christianity. Why do we have to “take” a vacation or “take” a nap but, we don’t “take” time to reflect? (From what entity do we “take” time? The terms imply that someone else possesses our time and requires

our TAKING it away so we can enjoy it?) Jesus taught his apostles many things. Among the things he demonstrated for them was the ability to “get away” and rest when they had been working hard doing and teaching. They TOOK TIME out from doing “good works”. Why do you think Mark wrote this into scripture? Mark put into his gospel only what he thought was important of Christ’s life and message. Even Christ could not escape the crowds who wanted something from him. We have to vacate far enough away so that we cannot “get called back”. There is always PLENTY to do to fill every minute of every hour of life. We have to take the time to eat, sleep and renew. That’s the root of “RE-CREATION”. We take the time to “recreate” a renewed heart and mind. Even in the secular world, we know this to be true as in the adage, “All work and no play makes Jack a DULL boy”. One of the greatest prices of “fame” and “fortune” is the lack of privacy and the inability to “get away” from the “rat race”. Jesus treasured his time in seclusion. Do you think he resented the crowds that pressured him at every turn? Stay-at-home mothers know the feeling all too well. There are no days “off” when one has constant responsibility for others. The Board at Christ the Redeemer Church wisely wrote into the contract for the preacher that he HAD to take his vacation days. A church that does not function when the preacher is gone is not much of a church. Preachers who do not know how to take vacations do not understand their ministry and do not “trust” their church members. Knowing of his impending death, Jesus worked very hard to teach the disciples and apostles what to do in his absence. Jesus took “time off”. Jesus sought solitude to pray and think and refresh his mind and body. Take time off NOW. We will never be younger or healthier. It’s high time that Christians learned from the Master and VACATED their daily lives so that WE can be “re-created”, refreshed and “renewed” for ministry. God will help you pack and go WITH YOU. Yes, VACATIONS are Biblical and part of living effectual and productive lives of ministry. Now, GO and enjoy your time AWAY.