

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, August 2, 2009

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

### **Living on “bread” and “water”**

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#### The Lectionary Readings for the week:

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Psalm 51:1-13

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

The Bible is such a great literary work because it contains information for the ages written at the reading and understanding level of the people alive at the time of its writing. It is a work of history, theology, poetry, geography and the economy as they relate to ETERNITY. We “punish” criminals by only allowing them “bread and water” for rations. Withholding food and water is seen as “inhumane” treatment under every law of “justice” or “warfare”. We spend our days working to “bring home the bacon” or to eke out a “living” so we won’t starve. We in America are spoiled rotten by our modern supermarkets with their panoply of every foodstuff imaginable. Being lazy, we usually choose the “quick and the dead” of what is available. I can envision a microwave on the altar of a church as an icon of our faith as easily as a cross or chalice. Some kids don’t know that milk comes from cows or that the water in the toilet was once rain falling from the sky. Some adults are equally dense in their ignorance of “every good thing coming from the Father”. Everyone “believes in the power of electricity”. Not everyone believes in the existence of God. Christ offers us “living water” and “living bread” to sustain us in eternity but we choose to not believe? Yes, we choose to live in ignorance and to ignore the consequences of our lack of planning. David tried to ignore God’s authority. Paul tried it and was stricken blind to “get his attention”. Five thousand people were miraculously fed by five loaves and two fishes but they were not convinced. What will it take to convince you and me that God exists and that we must choose to live on “bread and water” for eternity?

#### **2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a**

**When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.**

**But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with**

***his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."***

***Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."***

This is the continuation of the lie that began with the adultery of David and Bathsheba from last week's discussion. It implies that Bathsheba did not know that David had her husband murdered. I will not repeat the Jewish traditional period of mourning and the rituals involved having already discussed it in previous columns. David thought that, by marrying the "widow Uriah", he could cover up the adultery? He fooled everyone but God who sent Nathan to confront David about the "sin". Nathan told a story about a "favorite lamb" that was "taken" by a person who had power over the owner of the lamb. The owner of the lamb was heart-broken that his "pet" was taken when the lord had a flock of sheep that he could have used. The temerity of the "lord" who stole the pet lamb infuriated David. David was livid UNTIL Nathan said "You are the man!" Oops! Caught. Not only did Nathan know about the adultery, he also knew about the murder of Uriah by "using the sword of the Ammonites" to do his dirty work. God "cursed" David's house because of the lie and the attempted cover-up that the "sword shall never depart from your house". The simple act of adultery led to dire consequences for David, Bathsheba, their infant son and all the rest of David's reign. David had everything a person could desire. He was KING. He could have had any un-married woman in Israel as his "right". If Uriah had been a coward, shirked his duty, betrayed his king, or done anything outside of Jewish law, David could have legally had him executed. David had it "made in the

shade” but that was not enough. It was like Lyndon Baines Johnson who once said, “I don’t want all the land, just the land that is next to mine.” David would have been better off staying a simple shepherd and living on “bread and water” than displeasing God and lying to himself. I’ll nearly bet you that David had often wished he had stayed a shepherd tending his flocks and playing his harp than having to face up to his disgrace and embarrassment at the hand of God through Nathan. Be careful what you wish for because it may not be “good for you”. Wanting what someone else has seldom leads to happiness. At least, that has been my experience and David’s experience.

### **Psalm 51:1-13**

1

**Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; \*  
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.**

2

**Wash me through and through from my wickedness \*  
and cleanse me from my sin.**

3

**For I know my transgressions, \*  
and my sin is ever before me.**

4

**Against you only have I sinned \*  
and done what is evil in your sight.**

5

**And so you are justified when you speak \*  
and upright in your judgment.**

6

**Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, \*  
a sinner from my mother's womb.**

7

**For behold, you look for truth deep within me, \*  
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.**

8

**Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; \*  
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.**

9

**Make me hear of joy and gladness, \*  
that the body you have broken may rejoice.**

10

**Hide your face from my sins \*  
and blot out all my iniquities.**

11

**Create in me a clean heart, O God, \*  
and renew a right spirit within me.**

3

12

***Cast me not away from your presence \*  
and take not your holy Spirit from me.***

13

***Give me the joy of your saving help again \*  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.***

This is the psalmist's plea for a "new beginning" or a "second chance" in his relationship with God. Could I pray this prayer? "You betchum, Red Ryder." I could pray it daily. Who of us does not fail to be what God would want us to be? The answer to any "sin problem" is the recognition that "sin" has occurred and that forgiveness is only possible by the grace of God. Any time we seek an "answer" to our sin elsewhere, we usually end up worse off than before. We should be content with "bread and water" in God's presence over "barbecue and beer" in our sinful state. This is not a prohibition against any form of drink or food. I am speaking of the "attitude" of the "eater". As Paul said, "I have had a lot and I have had a little...my secret is that I have learned to be content in either situation." That is a lesson that I wish I could learn for myself and be able to teach others. For my obese brothers and sisters: Every diet works. The secret to weight loss is "burn more calories than you eat." That is the summation of EVERY diet book ever written or that will ever be written. The secret to God's diet is: "Be content with the "bread" and "water" that I GIVE YOU. Have faith that the supply is un-ending. I love you and you will never starve for love in my presence." Our problem is that we confuse "happiness" with "contentment".

### **Ephesians 4:1-16**

***I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said,***

***"When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;  
he gave gifts to his people."***

***(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by***

**people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.**

I will not put you through the esoteric discussion of a theology class regarding the “hidden meanings” and “canonical jargon” represented in this excerpt from Ephesians. Disregard the shrouded mysticism and focus on what is obvious in the passage. It is about our being humble enough to be gentle and patient with each other in love so that we can maintain our bond of UNITY of peace. Peace is a gift that requires the work of self-examination, discernment and great love in the deepest sense. We are forced to “see things as others see them” and to “not regard ourselves as “better” or “smarter” than any other”. There is a “place” for every being as part of the “body of Christ”. All caterpillars do not become butterflies until they can wriggle out of their “shells”. Sometimes, we have to help them chew their way out so they can spread their wings and become beautiful creatures in the Lord. I am continually amazed at the previously-hidden talents that are in the small group of believers with whom I worship. Our group is small at Christ the Redeemer Church. I am encouraged and amazed when people who would be overlooked in other groups rise to the occasion and amaze even themselves. Many have no “church background” or worshipped in “large churches” where they were mainly “spectators”. What a waste it would have been if they had never spread their wings and let out the butterfly? Who among YOUR GROUP is a caterpillar just waiting to be freed to spread their wings? We have to fulfill our call to ministry which begins with “Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and being and TREAT YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” That “speaking the truth in love” is one of the most perverted portions of the good news. Just because we say “in Christian love” right before we curse someone, abase someone, discourage someone, condemn someone or ostracize someone does not free us from any responsibility for our words or deeds. It is not a license to act capriciously or to injure anyone. Our words and deeds must always be spoken in such a way as to equip, sustain, encourage and embolden others to greater service through ministry. Each should wish the best for the other BECAUSE when the “body” is working properly, it “promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” That is the litmus test for our “speaking the truth in love”. IF “speaking the truth in love” does not promote and encourage unity of the “body”, it is not of God and we would do better to remain silent. There, I’ve said it and I hope it is taken as “speaking the truth in love”. What Christians MUST have in common are: “One bread, one body, one source of ‘living water’” that sustains us all.

## **John 6:24-35**

***The next day, when the people who remained after the feeding of the five thousand saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, `He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."***

***Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."***

It has always amazed me how many of the great lessons of scripture are anchored around mealtimes and food issues. Perhaps this is because every living organism, plant or animal, needs food and water to survive. This passage and the surrounding passages are central to an understanding of what our relationship with God through Christ must become. Those who ate their fill in their physical bodies awoke wanting more to fill their bellies the very next morning. Christ was seen as their meal ticket IN THIS WORLD. Do we think of Christ as someone who will be at our beck and call IN THIS WORLD to heal us, feed us, clothe us and protect us from every evil force? Are we no "smarter" than the 5,000 hungry people looking for physical "food"? Read the passage again. Can we not see that Christ is talking about two very distinct "areas" of our lives? Do we assume that Christ is some kind of amulet or "good luck charm" that we can claim and use whenever we wish? We can see and experience the temporal with pain, disease, hunger and thirst. What Christ is talking about is the spiritual world which is ETERNAL. We spend most of our time worrying about THIS WORLD when we should spend more time thinking about the ETERNAL "WORLD" that lies beyond our mortal lives. A "faith that sustains" is eternal. A "shallow faith" is wishy-washy and ethereal. Which is my faith? Is my faith founded in THIS WORLD and its comforts or is my faith founded in ETERNITY where there is God and His blessings. Christ hungered. Christ thirsted. Christ was in pain. Christ lost friends to death. Christ was betrayed by his best friends. Christ was lied about. Christ cried out as though abandoned on the cross. Don't tell me Christ has no understanding of my world. His faith was

based on experience, faith and knowledge. Upon what is my faith based? Do I "call upon God" only when I NEED SOMETHING in THIS WORLD? When I am in pain, when I get cancer, when my friends and family are at the point of death, is that the only time I think about God? If so, my faith and understanding is no deeper than the "5000 who had supper with Christ". What Jesus attempts to teach us in this passage from John is that what God offers is the strength to endure THIS WORLD and faith to ATTAIN the ETERNAL WORLD. That is why Paul could boast "To live IS Christ, to die is GAIN." IF God hears our cries for help and relief IN THIS WORLD, it is but a foretaste of the BOUNTY that awaits us in God's presence in the spiritual ETERNAL WORLD. Faith is our "pass" that allows us to enter. Faith is what gets us the "breakfast of ETERNITY" which fills us so that we never hunger or thirst. Heaven is living on "bread" and "water"? ***Jesus said to them (and us, about our potential ETERNAL HOME), "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."***