

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, August 23, 2009

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

Myth America, our ideal

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

1 Kings 8: (1, 6, 10-11), 22-30, 41-43

Psalm 84

Ephesians 6:10-20

John 6:56-69

“Question Authority”- bumper sticker

“Rave against the machine.” - Bumper sticker

Webster’s Definition of “MYTH”:

1 a : a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon **b** : **PARABLE, ALLEGORY**

2 a : a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; *especially* : one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society.

This discussion may offend some. That is not my goal. My goal is to share thoughts and encourage discussion. Note that the “b” part of the first part of the definition by Webster of “MYTH” is “*parable*”, “*allegory*”. Keep this in mind as you read this. As part of MY discipline, I have been reviewing the subject of “mythology” which is rife in the Bible. We in America are heirs of the “Judeo-Christian” MYTH. Those of other world religions are recipients of their own brand and blends of MYTH. After all, “religion” is another word for “superstition”. MYTHS are contemporary explanations of “Where did WE come from? Why are WE here? And “Where are WE going?” the essential questions of all sentient beings. The ancients attempted to explain “natural phenomena” by myths about Zeus, Hera, and Hercules, the Titans, “monsters” and other convenient characters to explain the world around them. They really made it difficult for themselves because they had a “married, philandering Chief God” and many “gods” and “demigods” that they had to placate to survive. Do WE create more difficult “rules” (MYTHS) for our compliance with “God’s will” than are necessary? MYTH is a four-letter word but, it is not a “bad word”. MYTH enabled the ancient peoples to feel safe and grounded in faith that “the gods” were in control of everything in the world How much of what we believe is MYTH? Is it egomaniacal to examine EVERYTHING for truth and meaning? Call me a “heretic” if you wish. Many others have because of my questioning MY faith and myths of MY heritage. Faith that is somehow passed down via chromosomes is no more meaningful than eye, hair or skin color. For instance, the “Greek Myths” of the “Twelve Labors of Hercules” contain many similarities to Judeo-Christian myths. I remind you that the author of Genesis was NOT present when the world was created so his account is also MYTH. WE have accepted the MYTHS of our culture and tend to denigrate the myths of other cultures as somehow inferior in

value and “truth”? In order to understand Christianity, we must also understand Judaism and its myths. Yes, many are MYTHS. Every person must adapt THEIR myths to be congruent with THE PREVAILING society’s myth or they will become pariahs and outcasts. Being a “believing heretic” is hard on the one who questions. What MYTHS have we accepted as part of our “religious heritage”? Just because they are MYTHS does not cheapen their value or depreciate their meaning for us. A study of “Comparative Religions” is nothing more or less than “comparing MY MYTH to someone else’s MYTH”. What I’m trying to say is: IF I had been born in another country and been curious about the natural world and “God”, I would have accepted or “questioned” the MYTHS of that culture and adapted myself to conformity with the “prevailing mythical story” concurrent with my family, religion and country. (Those who question in other religions are often labeled as “mystics” or “seekers”. In America they are called “free-thinkers” or “heretics”.) Since I was born in the United States, I quite naturally glom onto the “Judeo-Christian” ideology and MYTH. As an adult, it is high time to re-examine the validity and usefulness of that MYTH. To make a “god” of David, Solomon, Peter, Paul or any other human is no less foolish than the “Greek Mythology” that attempts to create an “idol or god” for worship. We should be smart enough and experienced enough to “by-pass” the garbage and seek the Lord, the living God who loves us, without being impeded in our search by manmade MYTH. The ultimate purpose of MYTHS is to bring us to a clearer understanding of who we are and whose we are. Don’t get bogged down in the parsing of each word of scripture. Spend your time on the “big picture” of what you read and study. It is not my intention to “convert” anyone to “my way of thinking” or my “opinion”. My stated intention is to allow others to do their own “disciplined study” of everything around us and to come to their OWN conclusion. Remember that the moniker, “He or she is a *Good Christian*” is usually the opinion of human observers who compare the person to “their PERSONAL MYTH’S standards” and not God’s standards. The goal is to be seen by man as God sees us...loved unconditionally despite our questions and doubts. “Free Will” means that WE get to CHOOSE our MYTH. Happy hunting!

1 Kings 8: [1, 6, 10-11], 22-30, 41-43

[Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.]

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, “O LORD,

God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, 'There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me.' Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

This is Solomon's "invocation" at the opening of the first Temple in Jerusalem which would be called "Solomon's Temple". Yes, there were other "Temples" that we have discussed previously. You may have noticed on TV the Jews "praying toward the West Wall" of the Temple. The West Wall is the only remaining vertical structure from the edifice known as "Herod's Temple" and the practice of praying TOWARD the Temple is still practiced. (Some make fun of the Islamic practice of "praying toward Mecca"? It is integral to THEIR MYTH as is this practice to the Jewish MYTH. Some Christians make a "pilgrimage to pray at the Vatican". What's the difference? NONE. They only believe a different MYTH.) It is always easier to make fun of the MYTH of others than it is to closely examine one's own MYTH. In which direction should the "good Christian" pray? Should prayer be "valid" only if it is done in a "church building" accompanied by the "lighting of prayer candles" or if it is prayed by "certain PRIESTLY people"? MYTH is all around us and many blindly cling to MYTH as ritualistically as those in other "religions". "Whatever gets you through the night" was a common phrase of agreement with the MYTH of others during the 1960's when America experienced a renewal and reformation of our national MYTH. Fundamentalists in EVERY religion have their "self-serving" MYTHS despite what they may think. No, that's the problem, they DON'T think. Knowingly or unknowingly, Solomon created the MYTHOLOGY of Temple worship and it persists to this very day.

"Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name -- for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm-- when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and

do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

Ditto the comments above and add that there was provision made for those who were not “God’s people” to receive blessing from praying “toward this house”. Many non-Jews, including our current and past Presidents, continue this practice as seen on TV and in the news.

Psalm 84 or 84:1-6

1

***How dear to me is your dwelling, O LORD of hosts! **
***My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the LORD;*
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.****

2

***The sparrow has found her a house
and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; *
by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.***

3

***Happy are they who dwell in your house! *
they will always be praising you.***

4

***Happy are the people whose strength is in you! *
whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.***

5

***Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of
springs, *
for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.***

6

***They will climb from height to height, *
and the God of gods will reveal himself in Zion.***

7

***LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; *
hearken, O God of Jacob.***

8

***Behold our defender, O God; *
and look upon the face of your Anointed.***

9

***For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own
room, **
***and to stand at the threshold of the house of my God
than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.*****

10

*For the LORD God is both sun and shield; *
he will give grace and glory;*

11

*No good thing will the LORD withhold *
from those who walk with integrity.*

12

*O LORD of hosts, *
happy are they who put their trust in you!*

Psalm 84 has been the codex for at least three songs that I can recall without much difficulty. This psalm is a praise and worship “song” created for use in the Temple. It is still a useful source of refreshment and encouragement as part of our MYTH. I just wish that my praying “toward the Temple Mount” would bring the rains spoken about in this “song”.

Ephesians 6:10-20

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

Treatises have been written on the words, “***but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the HEAVENLY places.***” Paul’s admonition to the Ephesians is to “***Be strong IN THE LORD and in the strength of HIS POWER.***” Often, we try to be “strong in OUR OWN ‘power’”. If anyone thinks they are “powerful”, ask them to “make it rain immediately” to confirm their omnipotence. If they cannot, they are not as smart or as powerful as they would like us to believe. They have generated and believed their own MYTH. We should be very careful in “inventing a MYTH” because we just might have to live up to it. I will not discuss again the parts of the armor as described by Paul. His

description is concurrent with the time and pictures a Roman soldier's battledress with a spiritual tie to each portion of the armor e.g., "the belt of truth", "the breastplate of righteousness". Many is the time I participated in a "sword drill" (***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God***) in which kids raced against each other to find a particular verse in their Bibles. The Christian is therefore "ready to do battle" protected by the armor God supplies. Paul reminds us that "prayer" is a continual conversation with God as we ask (*supplication* = begging) for strength for each day. He asks for prayer for himself and for "all the saints". Biblically, "all the saints" refers to "those who have been 'sanctified' by the blood of the Lamb" and not just the men and women in "church pictures" wearing HALOS. Another MYTH bites the dust...Christ "canonizes" (makes us 'saints') us as we accept Him as Lord. I still have trouble thinking of Gary Smith as "Saint Gary". Perhaps I'm not alone. "Saint Bert" sounds equally provocative.

John 6:56-69

Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

How many weeks now have we been reading essentially the same words of Jesus about his "flesh" and "blood" being eaten as THE ESSENTIAL CRITERION for salvation? Have we fully internalized the concept? The Disciples mentioned in this passage had a hard time with this because of their MYTH and surroundings. The Romans used the Holy Communion practiced by Christians as an excuse to persecute them for "cannibalism". The Romans were as confused about the "eating" of Christ's body and the "drinking of Christ's blood" as these Disciples and many "believers" today. The "emblems" of communion, the "bread" and the "wine", are MYTHIC symbols instituted by Christ

at the “Last Supper” as a PRACTICING JEW. They began as part of the “myth of Passover” when God delivered the Jews from “the MYTH of Egyptian slavery”. The “emblems”, like all good mythical items, attempt to explain and represent a “concept” by symbolizing the action of some “hero” or some extraordinary event. Jesus, in this passage, is re-writing the MYTH of the relationship between God and mankind and makes himself the “hero” who overcomes adversity. Jesus is the MYTHICAL Messiah who is the sacrificial “lamb” of Passover who “gave his life” for those who believe in the MYTHIC ability of the “sacrificial lamb” to remove sin from God’s remembrance. Instead of the sinner’s presenting the “Paschal Lamb” to God at the Temple, Jesus is our “Lamb of God” who offers himself to God so that we might be forgiven by our recognition of his being the “Holy Lamb of God”. Some rebelled at this revision of the MYTH. They wanted to remain under an “inherited” MYTH that they understood because it was congenital to them and “traditional”. What MYTHS are we unwilling to give up? If we have no other MYTH than Christianity, whose MYTH will take its place? Humans will always adopt and adapt a MYTH to fit their personal “needs”. (Yes, atheism, Gnosticism and agnosticism ARE MYTHS that fit the needs of some. Just try to elucidate this for them if you want to be utterly frustrated.) If we reject the MYTH of Jesus as Savior, to whom will we turn for salvation? That is the ultimate question, isn’t it? The Jews are still awaiting the “answer” to their prayers for the Messiah’s arrival. (Could we say that they have “mythed their Messiah”?) PUN INTENDED. Have WE accepted Jesus as our “Deliverer”? Have we rejected the Savior if we have not accepted the MYTH concerning the Savior? Jesus came to fulfill the promise of the MYTH of the Redeemer and to supplant the old MYTH with a new MYTH. The Jews chose to cling to the old MYTH and to reject the new MYTH. What is my excuse for clinging to the old MYTHS of damnation and not accepting the new MYTH of salvation? I cannot speak for other people or other cultures but, America has not accepted the MYTH of salvation in Christ Jesus FOR REAL. We hold up the MYTH of the past as our IDEAL and reject the simple new MYTH because we are as stubborn as the Disciples of this passage. Picture a beautiful young woman wearing a tiara and holding long-stem roses and Bert Parks singing “There she is...” Is she really your MYTHICAL “ideal” woman? Choose your MYTHS wisely as the MYTHS we choose to accept and follow determine who we are and whose we are. Because we have chosen our MYTH foolishly, many of us have lost our bearings spiritually. We need our own “MYTH” to explain God and our relationship to Him and His Son, Jesus. I have my MYTHS. Get your own MYTH. My closing question is: What is the difference between “FAITH” and “MYTH”? TBL = “to be discussed later.”