

## **eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, September 13, 2009**

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

### **Spiritual “School Supplies”**

*This discussion is the opinion of Bert Cobb and is not necessarily the opinion of anyone else. Do not interpret these reflections to mean anything other than what Bert Cobb thinks and feels. They are for the exhortation, encouragement, and edification of the Saints and may be used freely for that purpose.*

The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Proverbs 1:20-33 Psalm 19

James 3:1-12 Mark 8:27-38

### **Proverbs 1:20-33**

**Wisdom cries out in the street;**

**in the squares SHE raises her voice.**

***At the busiest corner she cries out;***

***at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:***

**"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?"**

***How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing  
and fools hate knowledge?***

***Give heed to my reproof;***

***I will pour out my thoughts to you;***

***I will make my words known to you.***

***Because I have called and you refused,***

***have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,***

***and because you have ignored all my counsel***

***and would have none of my reproof,***

***I also will laugh at your calamity;***

***I will mock when panic strikes you,***

***when panic strikes you like a storm,***

***and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,***

***when distress and anguish come upon you.***

***Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;***

***they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.***

***Because they hated knowledge***

***and did not choose the fear of the LORD,***

***would have none of my counsel,***

***and despised all my reproof,***

***therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way***

***and be sated with their own devices.***

**For waywardness kills the simple,**

**and the complacency of fools destroys them;**

**but those who listen to me will be secure**

**and will live at ease, without dread of disaster."**

This "proverbial" passage encompasses a "metaphor" in which "wisdom" is characterized as a "wise woman" crying at the gates to the city. It also implies that the "voice" is God's voice. Was the author being "sexist" or was the author using the "sex" as a means to imply the intimacy of the information? Do people listen better to a female voice? Is that why every "GPS device" has a "female voice"? James Bond's car in Tomorrow Never Dies even speaks in a female German accent as a means of getting Bond, James Bond, to listen to the advice of the device. This passage was obviously written TO MEN? In the field of "transactional analysis", this "voice" is the "parental voice". Is the advice that is offered sound advice? Does it have meaning for modern readers? It is a metaphor for our inattention to the "wise voice" of God who speaks knowledge and wisdom BUT we, both men and women, have not "listened", have we? The term "simple" is a synonym for "uneducated". It is not "stupid" because you "can't fix stupid". The author obviously has FAITH that some will listen and obey. Like most of FAITH, it is our choice. We remain "simple" because we do not seize opportunity for education or salvation even when God speaks "wisdom" to us in a quiet, male/female/parental voice. God does not shout in an unintelligible language. God speaks quietly in a voice that we can clearly understand IF we wish to listen with our hearts and minds. Wisdom is always there for those who CHOOSE to listen. As in the time of the writing of Proverbs, truth and wisdom are all around us but our hard hearts have calloused "ears" and we have earplugs of indifference between us and God's voice. In the "Baptist" terms, God wants to "share" wisdom and knowledge with us IF we will only listen.

## **Psalm 19**

1

**The heavens declare the glory of God, \*  
and the firmament shows his handiwork.**

2

***One day tells its tale to another, \*  
and one night imparts knowledge to another.***

3

**Although they have no words or language, \*  
and their voices are not heard,**

4

***Their sound has gone out into all lands, \*  
and their message to the ends of the world.***

5

***In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; \*  
it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;  
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.***

6

2

***It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens  
and runs about to the end of it again; \*  
nothing is hidden from its burning heat.***

7

***The law of the LORD is perfect  
and revives the soul; \*  
the testimony of the LORD is sure  
and gives wisdom to the innocent.***

8

***The statutes of the LORD are just  
and rejoice the heart; \*  
the commandment of the LORD is clear  
and gives light to the eyes.***

9

***The fear of the LORD is clean  
and endures for ever; \*  
the judgments of the LORD are true  
and righteous altogether.***

10

***More to be desired are they than gold,  
more than much fine gold, \*  
sweeter far than honey,  
than honey in the comb.***

11

***By them also is your servant enlightened, \*  
and in keeping them there is great reward.***

12

***Who can tell how often he offends? \*  
cleanse me from my secret faults.***

13

***Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;  
let them not get dominion over me; \*  
then shall I be whole and sound,  
and innocent of a great offense.***

14

***Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my  
heart be acceptable in your sight, \*  
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.***

Even though we may have never read a Bible or heard a “sermon”, we should be aware of the existence of a “Creator” simply by our study of the world around us. The wondrous power and beauty of the natural world is what inspired the pagan to worship nature as “God”. WE have no excuse for our ignorance. Even the

hotels and motels in which we stay on vacation have a Bible in the bedside drawer right next to the Koran and the Book of Mormon. Turn on your TV and someone will yell the "Gospel" at you right before they ask you to "participate in their ministry with a GIFT of 'financial support'". Why do we get by with calling ourselves the "civilized world"? The opportunity for education about God is wasted on the Western world. We have "free public education", prolific newspaper, radio and television and Bibles are drowning our coffee tables and bookshelves. How can we see a sunset, a newborn baby, a sunrise or a lightning storm and not wonder "Who created these wondrous things"? The closing verse of Psalm 19 invokes the blessing of the Creator to strengthen the one who would proclaim the message of the existence of the "Creator". Many gospel ministers have prayed this "blessing" upon their public words to invoke the Creator's approval: ***"Let the words of MY mouth and the meditation of MY heart be acceptable in your SIGHT, O Lord, MY strength and MY redeemer."*** It is a prayer that each of us needs in our everyday discourse. IF we could "run" the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts through the filter of their "being acceptable in God's sight", it would be a much different world and a more "civilized" existence for all of us. God does not "need" me to defend God, especially in a shouting voice. "Screaming voices" and "shouting" are so prevalent today that they fail to get our attention. God's voice and message are best exemplified by the "quiet voice of reason and HOPE". All else is "a tale told by and idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

### **James 3:1-12**

***Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.***

***How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue-- a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.***

I wish they would make this passage MANDATORY memorization at every

“theology school” in the world. It should be read aloud at the beginning of any classroom event and used as a touchstone for anyone who wishes to use their status as “teacher” to espouse a personal “agenda”. The Gospel is simple and does not need our petty embellishments. This passage humbles me and makes me fully aware of the serious mistake of “speaking for God” or teaching “heresy”. Why do you think James wrote it in his book? Obviously, he was addressing a “problem” that was prevalent enough to cause concern among the “faithful”. Paul had to deal with “false teachers” in almost every “church” he “started”. Have you or I ever been guilty of “false doctrine”? THIS IS THE REASON THAT I CLEARLY STATE THIS DISCUSSION AS “MY OPINIONS”. It is my “out” for my “ignorance” and should NEVER be the last time you THINK about these passages. The scriptures are like a kaleidoscope that changes with each “looking”. It all depends on the “viewer” and the “changes” in the mirrors and prisms through which the light passes. As we learn and experience life, our “vision” changes so that we “see” scripture through different “lenses” and “mirrors”. Trust me; you can NEVER learn it all. Satanists and atheists can quote scripture better than most “believers” and it has not done them a bit of good? INFORMATION is NOT EDUCATION. Opinions should be written on an “Etch-A-Sketch” so that they can be easily changed or erased. James uses the metaphor of the “bits” we put into the mouths of horses as a means of our control. Having been “around horses”, I know that, sometimes, the mouth of the horse becomes so “calloused” that they no longer obey the “bit” and run amok. He also uses the word picture of a sailboat’s rudder which, even though small in surface area, is able to control a huge ship. A “keel” and a rudder work in tandem to steer a sailboat and keep it “headed in the right direction”. (The term “starboard”, used to indicate the “right side” of a boat, is a corruption of the term “steer board” which indicated that the “steering board” was usually located on the “right side” of the boat.) Then, James starts to really “meddle” with his discussion of the “tongue”. He likens the tongue to a single match that can set a huge fire in motion and destroy forests, homes and lives. Humans have “tamed” almost every kind of beast to obey humans’ wills but, the human tongue is incapable of being “tamed”? The “curses” that James describes are not “four-letter” words so prevalent in “public speech”. What he is talking about is the “attitude” of the person speaking the words. Words, by and of themselves, have no power. Words are just blotches of ink on a page or vibrations in the air lacking meaning or context. It is the tongue, guided by the emotions and motives of the heart that “do the damage” to lives, relationships and reputations OR bless, encourage and edify their hearers. Christians often get really haughty with their “speak the truth, in love” and seem to believe that “pointing out the sin and the sinner” with hurtful words can lead to “repentance” and “salvation”. How STUPID can we be?

### **Mark 8:27-38**

***Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others,***

*one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.*

*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

Herod the Great built Caesarea Philippi on a most inhospitable seacoast and created the first hydraulic cement harbor to "honor" the Roman Emperor. He also built the Temple Mount and many forts and "retreats" including Masada. Exercise physiologists tell me that the "proper" pace for walking is reached when the walker "can carry on a conversation" with their "fellow walkers". Jesus did a lot of his "teaching" while he and his entourage were walking from village to village. "***When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His word...***" is a favorite hymn which commemorates this "walking and talking" ministry of Jesus. This passage is a "test" for the entourage to see if the "teachings" were penetrating the hearts and minds of those who were witnesses to the life of Christ. "***Who do PEOPLE say that I am?***" What a wonderful question. Note that he allowed them to answer with what OTHERS thought before he asked them what THEY thought. This is a classic teaching method which I often utilize in class. Get the OTHER opinions out on the table so that the "student" can "see" all the options and make a choice that is PERSONAL. Having baited the hook, Jesus then asked, "***But who do YOU say that I am?***" Peter, the impetuous Apostle spurted out "***You are the Messiah.***" This is the same impetuous, chicken-hearted Apostle who denied Christ three times on the night of his betrayal. Having a "faith issue" are we, Peter? The "evidence" for the Messiahship of Christ was obvious even to a fisherman like Peter. What happened next threw Peter's idea of "Messiah" to the winds. Peter got ANGRY when Jesus talked about his impending suffering, rejection by the Jewish leaders, his murder AND his resurrection. Peter got angry and "rebuked" Jesus? Wait a minute, Peter. Did you, or did you not, just announce to Christ in front of witnesses that "***YOU are the MESSIAH?***" Do we "get angry" when Jesus does not "meet our expectations"? Christ then "rebuked" Peter with his words "***Get behind me,***

**Satan!**” and don’t push. Okay, I added the “and don’t push.” Christ’s rebuke was for Peter’s attitude and lack of vision for the purpose of the Messiah because Peter was thinking only of his loss of a relationship with his FRIEND. Do we think more about the “human Christ” than the “spiritual Christ”? Peter wanted to “save Christ” for himself. Did he resent that Christ was Messiah for ALL people? Do we resent that Christ offers salvation even to those “we don’t think deserve it”? Yes, Peter and I are very much alike and I can see things through his impetuous eyes, can you? There is a lot of Peter in all of us. I think Mark wrote this to show us ourselves in the lives of the Apostles. If the Apostles could doubt and act foolishly, we should not be surprised at our impetuous foolishness.

The next verses answer the call to discipleship in Jesus. There is a PRICE for claiming to be a “follower” (disciple, student) of Jesus: the willingness to give up our physical existence to remain faithful to Christ. What would you and I do if we were fed to lions if we persisted in our FAITH in Christ? Many have faced this choice and overcome. IF I never face the “lions” decision, how can I really complain about “challenges to my faith”? Are we really “persecuted” for our FAITH? “Sticks and stones may break my bones but, words will never hurt me.” Is this a “proverb” or stupidity? Is our faith so “childish” that we allow “words” to question our personal belief system? IF we were tried for “being a Christian”, would there be enough “evidence” to convict us? What does it mean to be **“ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation”**? If earthly parents can continue to support and defend their children DESPITE evidence for their guilt and deeds, why can we not “stand up for” the Son of God, the Lord to whom we pledge our loyalty until DEATH? Faithful LOYALTY to Jesus allows us to transcend this mortal, physical world and to participate in the spiritual world of Christ and our Father in Heaven. Do our lives identify us as “faithful disciples” or “unfaithful disciples” of Jesus? What does it mean to “deny Christ”? How can we “neglect so great a salvation”? So, who do YOU say that Jesus IS? Can we truly say we are “Christians” and deny Christ with our unfaithful lives? It did not work for the Disciples and Apostles who were wishy-washy and it won’t work for us. The test will come every day. Are we ready? Can we live in this promise? ***“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*”** The good news is that you won’t need “two number-two pencils” for this test.