

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, September 6, 2009

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

### **The Gift of Hope**

*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 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

Psalm 125

James 2:1-10, (11-13), 14-17

Mark 7:24-37

This week's scriptures are very challenging to me because, as usual, I attempt to make the passages applicable to me and the reader. You might call my feeble attempts at scholarship a ministry of "practical Christianity". The scripture, **"Being always ready to give a REASON FOR THE HOPE that lies within YOU"** comes to mind. How can we understand scripture if we don't study? How can we "spread HOPE" if we have none? I have my opinions and ask that you form yours and be ready to explain your reasons for the FAITH, the HOPE and the LOVE you contain. Enjoy these heavily-edited thoughts as you "work out your OWN salvation with respect". HEADS UP, CLASS: I will ask the class for their opinions so that I might learn from them. If ever you find yourself in San Marcos, Texas, on Sunday morning, please come by and be part of the discussion.

### **Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23**

**A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,  
and favor is better than silver or gold.**

**The rich and the poor have this in common:  
the LORD is the maker of them all.**

**Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,  
and the rod of anger will fail.**

**Those who are generous are blessed,  
for they share their bread with the poor.**

**Do not rob the poor because they are poor,  
or crush the afflicted at the gate;  
for the LORD pleads their cause  
and despoils of life those who despoil them.**

The adages of the Book of Proverbs represent the collected "wisdom" of the ages. Solomon's true "wisdom" was collected and preserved for our benefit. This is the real "truth" of experience with its failures and successes. Yes, even Solomon occasionally failed to make wise decisions. The Book of Proverbs is

what SOLOMON found to be “truth”. The reader and I can see ourselves in many of these adages. When my father died, the most important “thing” he bequeathed to me was a “good name”. A reputation for speaking the truth and “doing the right thing” when no one will know otherwise marks the person who should be lauded for having “a good name”. *“When all is said and done, usually, a lot more is said than done.”* A “good name” can be ruined in an instant despite a lifetime of “being good”. Who determines what constitutes a “good name”? Every person has their detractors. Even Jesus had his “nay-sayers” and “enemies”. Today, a “good name” is ethereal and debatable as “facts” are “discovered” after death. America has a very short memory IF one is a “prominent” citizen or of the “popular” political persuasion. A good name is the only thing that lives on after us. “Popular opinion” has recently mistaken the “famous” with the “infamous” and afforded acclaim to both classifications. Historians take great joy in exposing the “truth” of many reputations. I have been amazed and stupefied by the recent “deification” of ne’er-do-wells who lived lives of depravity and dishonesty and were praised for things they never did while the “unmentionable” acts they performed were never mentioned in their eulogies. Shakespeare’s soliloquy by Mark Anthony at the funeral of Julius Caesar came to my mind: *“The evil that men do lives long after them. The good is often entered with their bones.”* Many live their lives AFTER some heinous act in a frantic attempt to “overcome” their foibles and create a more pleasing “legacy”. Some succeed and some fail. Both get on TV as a “documentary”. God gets the final judgment and leaves our “opinion” out of the equation. The “final judgment” is not by a “jury of our peers”, thank God. The ONLY one who must be pleased with our lives is GOD. All the other “critics” don’t get a final vote. Solomon’s vision is the **ideal** to which one should aspire but, a lot gets painted over and “forgotten” in the real world. It all depends on one’s PR person or attorneys. **Eulogy** means “speaking the truth” and I have rarely witnessed a truthful “eulogy” on TV or in the press. When a “good name” can be used as collateral for a loan or given as payment of bills, I will subscribe wholly to Solomon’s pronouncements. Until then, I remain suspicious and unconvinced. For most of us, in twenty years, NO ONE WILL REMEMBER that we ever lived except GOD. If you can outlive your detractors or the “statute of limitations” passes, you, too, can have a “good name”. Once the funeral is over, a good “name” is of little value except in the minds of the living.

## **Psalm 125**

1

***Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, \*  
which cannot be moved, but stands fast for ever.***

2

***The hills stand about Jerusalem; \*  
so does the LORD stand round about his people,  
from this time forth for evermore.***

3

2

**The scepter of the wicked shall not hold sway over the land allotted to the just, \*  
so that the just shall not put their hands to evil.**

4

**Show your goodness, O LORD, to those who are good \*  
and to those who are true of heart.**

5

**As for those who turn aside to crooked ways,  
the LORD will lead them away with the evildoers; \*  
but peace be upon Israel.**

I don't know what Solomon and David were smoking but I want some of it. (Could it have been "hope dope"?) Both of these first passages smack me up beside the head and I think that they are "pretty to think so" and that they are the "ideal" but not what usually happens. The HOPE that the "**scepter of the wicked shall not hold sway over the land allotted to the just**" is just that, "HOPE". God is ultimately in charge and we live in the HOPE that God will "make things turn out all right" but that is not what I see when I look around. Perhaps it was the week from Hell that I lived, the friends and family who die, the pain, the disappointments, aging, the failures and the losses that cloud my HOPE. Do I sit waiting for God to "make everything perfect"? HOPE must be constantly renewed and embraced. Without HOPE, there is little reason to live. Solomon and David both speak HOPEFULLY for what they expect will be IF they can only "hold on". The "lifesaver" that God tosses us in the midst of the storms of our lives is HOPE. Don't leave home without it. As Solomon said "Don't drink and drive, don't even PUTT."

**James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17**

**My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?**

**You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said,**

3

***"You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.]***

***What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.***

The Book of James almost did not "make the cut" when the New Testament books were being selected. There were several "theologians" who balked at that ***"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?"*** This was HERESY to many in Christianity because they thought that FAITH alone could save us. Did they not understand "grace"? They obviously did not understand "hospitality". Do we truly understand the concepts of "faith", "hope", "grace" and "love"? James thought of "faith" as a concept that required ACTION. FAITH must cause ACTION that flows from our understanding of a personal accountability toward God and his created beings. James even starts his diatribe with ***"My brothers and sisters..."*** Another way of saying what James was pointing out could be stated in the modern aphorism, *"People don't CARE how much you KNOW until they KNOW how much you CARE."* This is not suggested action by "a church" or "church 'tax-free' society". It is a suggested action for INDIVIDUAL Christians. "Churches" don't "do benevolent work". They "give" money or time or services to PEOPLE from and by PEOPLE. The "money they give" was given by INDIVIDUALS. That is the reason that they "give you a receipt for your taxes". Just like the government's "tax-payer identification number" or "social security number", God keeps an account of how faithful we are with our individual "faith in action". If Christians and churches acted in faith as suggested by James, there would be no need for governmental "social welfare programs" paid for with money stolen from the public through taxes. "Welfare" from the government demeans and makes people dependent and loyal to the government for their false "generosity". Christian "welfare", person-to-person, should make us and the recipients reliant on God and loyal to God instead of the government. At least, that is MY opinion based on my experiences.

### **Mark 7:24-37**

***Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him,***

**"Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go-- the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.**

**Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."**

I find the Jesus in this passage incongruent with the Jesus described in other New Testament passages. A "non-Jewish" woman, a Gentile, asked Jesus to "heal" her daughter and Jesus retorted with **"Let the children (Jews) be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food (the blessings of God) and throw it to the dogs (non-Jews)."** He was, in effect, comparing the Gentiles to "dogs". This was not about physical "bread". Was it about the "bread of life" which was "reserved" for the Jews in the minds of many of the Apostles and disciples? The Apostles were "Jews first" folks. They brought all their prejudices and agendas to their ministry. They were shocked when Jesus preached or did miracles to benefit "non-Jews". Jesus probably got very frustrated with them and did his best to change their hearts to be more open to ALL people. (The Jerusalem Council was convened to discipline those who dared to "preach to Gentiles".) This apparent example of "racism" and "sexism" does not make sense in light of the "Woman at the well" story in the Gospel of John. Maybe Mark did not hear clearly or he had an agenda? Was Jesus putting the woman "in her place"? Did this exchange somehow placate the Apostles or Mark's "audience"? Why did Mark put this in his "Gospel"? "Decapolis" means "the ten cities" and refers to ten prominent towns in the area of what we call "Asia Minor". He gave the Gentile woman grief for asking for the healing of her daughter but he took pity on a deaf and "dumb" man and healed him? **"He took him aside in private"** but Mark was able to record his words "exactly"? In my opinion, if something is incompatible with "what I know of Jesus", I tend to discount it or be wary of its validity. I must remember that Mark's gospel is "Mark's OPINION" of the events he records as "gospel". I am not the first or the last to have these doubts and concerns about these passages. I leave the reader to form their own opinion concerning scripture. Was Jesus a "racist" or a "sexist"? Do you really believe the Son of God viewed these issues with our prejudices and agendas? I cannot prove the point one way or the other except to say that I do not believe

God to be racist or sexist and therefore, HIS SON would not. Jesus died for the sins of ALL humanity regardless of race, sex, ethnicity or social standing. NO, "God is no respecter of persons" and wants us ALL to be obedient and happy children. I put great HOPE in this BELIEF. Faith (belief) can be affirmed by creating HOPE in the faithful "believer". I find HOPE in scripture, even those I don't understand. Giving HOPE is the greatest gift we can give one another.