

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, April 11, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas
Second Sunday of Easter

Only speak words you wouldn't mind eating

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This week's Lectionary readings:

Acts 5: 27-32

Psalm 150 Page 807, BCP

Revelation 1: 4-8

John 20: 19-31

We spend a lot of our time in our class bandying about words as though we understand them and agree upon their meaning. WORDS are important and an understanding of their definitions is critical. Words can either divide or unite. Words can either bless or curse. Words can either heal or harm. Wars have been fought over simple words with varied meanings between cultures. "Creeds" (means "I believe") began as devices for uniting Christian "beliefs" into terse statements that codified "a dogmatic litmus test" as to who was a "true believer" and who was not. Even the "creeds" caused division because it is impossible to codify God. "Litmus tests" NEVER work except in chemistry labs. Words can have a "life" of their own: "Nazi", "Christian Right", "Moral Majority", "Liberal", "Neo-con", "Femi-Nazi", etc. I think you get the point. We must be clear in our study that an agreement must be reached concerning the critical "words" we use between us. What is your definition of "grace", "hope", "faith" or "salvation"? How about "atonement", "sacrifice", "reconciliation", "redemption", "baptism" or "sanctification"? Sensing that we have insufficient "words" to separate us into "sects" and "isms", we quickly pass on to "forms of worship" and get bound up in "what form of worship is acceptable" or trying to "restore First-century Christianity"? (I doubt that many would want to do without air conditioning, electricity and furniture to re-create the "original Church". We would be forced to drink wine because Pasteur had not "invented" sterilization and our "grape juice" would "naturally" turn either to vinegar or wine. The Roman persecution would also be a real drag.) We disagree about the "kind of music", the "method of communion", "the form of church 'government'", "clergy" versus "laity" on and on until we feel like we cannot agree with anyone. In our striving to be "right" we somehow put God out of the discussion and it becomes "all about US" and God takes a "back seat" in our arguments. In theology, there are lots of words that tend to divide or unite. A study of many of the "books" within the canon or outside the canon can lead us into division as our "opinions" stratify us into layers of "believers" hell-bent on convincing others that we are "right" in our

opinions. We become human peanut M&M's: a hard outer "shell" with a "nut" inside. Lacking sufficient material to argue about, we demand that our "version" of scripture is somehow "superior" or "more scriptural" than some other without considering that ALL "translations" are copies of copies of copies of opinions based on opinions upon opinions. A prudent student might read ALL versions/translations and test each for "readability" and "truth". The key is finding one that "speaks to you" in words that you can "understand" and embrace as we "work out our own salvation". After the earthly ministry of Jesus had been completed and the sacrifice paid for our salvation, the "disciples" did not know what to "do next". We know this feeling. When we lose a particularly important person in our lives, we, too, often have difficulty "doing the next thing". A whole field of "study" arose from this controversy: eschatology, the study of "end times". ("Eschatology" should not be confused with "scatology" which is the study of animal feces even though one often resembles the other when taken to extremes.) The readings for this week are about those turbulent times when the early Church was trying to decide what to do next. Read and learn that our feelings are not new. What should WE be doing as we await the "Second Coming"?

Acts 5:27-32

When the temple police had brought the apostles, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

For many in Christianity, the plan seems to be: get saved and sit around waiting on God to "take us home". That's not in my "version" of the Book. The Book of Acts is all about what the disciples "did next" after Christ's ascension to the Father. In this passage, Peter was reeling from the realization that his Lord had been falsely accused, tried, convicted, murdered and resurrected. Peter had been offered the "keys to the Kingdom" yet he denied even knowing Jesus? This must have made him feel terrible as he abandoned his "best friend". What should he "do" now? This is Peter's reason for "doing the next thing". What is OUR reason for doing the next thing? Once the "savior" has come into our lives, what should we be doing? If there is no change in our opinions or actions, how do we KNOW that we have been changed by the saving power of Christ? Does "being saved" have any outward appearance? Does "being saved" require any action on our part? It all depends on our ATTITUDE, doesn't it? Are we grateful for the blood of Christ that cleaned us from sin and offers us eternal life? Then, the obvious answer is "Then, ACT like it" (Hence, the Book of ACTS.) We need

to get an “attitude of gratitude” and it will sustain us and motivate us. Christmas is for children. Easter is for adults who choose to ACT like adults.

Psalm 150 Page 807, BCP

Laudate Dominum

1

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his holy temple; *

praise him in the firmament of his power.

2

Praise him for his mighty acts; *

praise him for his excellent greatness.

3

Praise him with the blast of the ram's-horn; *

praise him with lyre and harp.

4

Praise him with timbrel and dance; *

praise him with strings and pipe.

5

Praise him with resounding cymbals; *

praise him with loud-clanging cymbals.

6

Let everything that has breath *

praise the LORD.

Hallelujah!

The psalmist is obviously grateful for HIS salvation from earthly threats and harm. Was the psalmist “saved” in the same way that believers are “saved”? Does our “salvation” save us from earthly harm as well as eternal damnation? Do we, in modern times, have the same awareness of the presence of God in our daily lives? Is God’s presence “palpable” to us in our daily lives or is God something we find only in our “church house”? If we have been “clothed in Christ” and have “put on Christ”, do we keep our “Christianity” in the coat closet at the back of the church building and don it only when in “church”? If so, does this mean that we face the world outside of church as “naked” Christians? Are we the “same people” IN CHURCH as we are OUT OF CHURCH? Are we “playing at being Christians”? Is our “light” only available “in church” as we light the candles? Do we “leave our light” at the church house and extinguish the “light” at the end of our worship service? NO, the light must follow us and be visible ESPECIALLY outside the church house IF we are to be the “light of the world” or the “salt of the earth”. Let me clarify the previous statement: We are NOT the LIGHT. We merely REFLECT the LIGHT of God’s love because we are “doing the next thing.” The key to successful Christian living is to be the same vulnerable, loving, caring and productive people OUTSIDE of worship as we are

IN worship. I know a few who have succeeded in this and they seem to be happy and productive people of great faith that is demonstrable and palpable to everyone they meet. Perhaps this is the reason that Paul (read I Timothy) required that Elder candidates have a “good reputation” IN church and OUTSIDE church? “Let YOUR LIGHT so shine that OTHERS may SEE your GOOD WORKS and GLORIFY the Father in Heaven.” If we are asking, “What do I do next?” this might be a good start.

Revelation 1:4-8

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

The Book of Revelation has caused more controversy and division as to its “meaning” than all the other “books” combined. Unless you read the words very superficially and take the greater meaning from them, we can easily get mired in “isms” and “definitions”. (Here is where the argument usually begins as people are wont to give their “opinion” as fact but, I press on...) There are a lot of “general truths” that we can agree upon: “I am the Alpha and the Omega”, for instance, when describing the omnipresence of God. The writer was prefacing his “book” of warnings about events in the IMMEDIATE future for the seven churches of Asia. To read more than is intended is folly and a “fool’s errand”, in my opinion. It is not the scriptures that I don’t understand that trouble me. It is the ones that I DO understand that convict me and encourage me. Therefore, I am “doing the next thing” by discussing the next passage.

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands,

and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

We have discussed the subject of the "Doubting Thomas" ad infinitum in past years. The intuitive Christian must realize that we bear a strong resemblance to Thomas in that we, too, require a lot from Christ to convince us to believe in His being Lord, don't we? How many of us still doubt our salvation? How many of us "demand a sign" that God loves us and cares for us? How many of us are wondering about "what to do next" in our lives as Christians? (When I was baptized at age 12, I was given a pamphlet entitled "Now that I am a Christian." NOW is when I need to read the book. At 12, I thought I KNEW what to do. It sure would have been nice to have ALL the answers, wouldn't it?) John concludes his gospel book with the reason for his writing the treatise about the life of Jesus: ***"But these are written so that you may COME TO BELIEVE that JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, the Son of God, and that THROUGH BELIEVING you MAY HAVE life in his name."*** It is though John is saying, "If you want to make sure there is a "reason" for YOUR LIFE, make sure that what you do and say will cause others to believe in Jesus so that they, too, may acquire faith that will save them." What is the next thing we should do? In many passages the Bible suggests, "Do the next thing with an attitude of gratitude and service so that you can take JOY in your faith in Christ." By living lives of service motivated by our gratitude, we can share our HOPE, our JOY and our PEACE with everyone we encounter. We are no longer orphans of the world. We are REDEEMED, bought back, adopted by God as sanctified heirs with special purpose. We are to reflect the FACE of the Father to the world so that they can catch a glimpse of the HOPE of salvation that we have as our inheritance. Why do we need words? Scripture says, "Being ALWAYS ready to give a reason for the HOPE that lies within you." Our words have meaning if we speak with the love of our Father. "Soft words turn away wrath." What other songs, hymns or spiritual sayings can you conjure up to support this idea? Speak words of love, peace, unity and grace because they are the words we all long to hear. Words are important. To avoid severe "indigestion", avoid speaking words you wouldn't mind eating.

