

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, April 4, 2010

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

Easter Sunday

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.

For whom would you be willing to die? Would you give up your future and life for your spouse, your friends, your kids, your parents, your job or your country? Few of us have had to make this choice. Few would give up their life for friend or family. None would give up life for a "bad person", would they? Christ WILLINGLY GAVE up His life for a world of SINNERS, you and me. Surely, I went into the military with the possibility of "giving my life for my country" as one of the "risks" of serving but, the percentage, even in warfare, is not 100 percent. Statistically, I am more likely to die in a car crash than in warfare. When did Jesus KNOW that his murder was inevitable? Did he always know that he MUST die to fulfill prophecy? The events of Christmas celebrated the birth of Messiah and it was SURE that God's plan determined that HE should die to fulfill his "reason for living". Jesus tried to warn his disciples of his impending trial and murder but, they refused to believe it. They, too, misunderstood the "gift" of Jesus. Yes, we all will die but, it is usually not for so noble a purpose as "saving the world", is it? Last week, in class, we discussed the possibilities of Jesus' being all God, all man or half-and-half. God does not die. Man always dies. A person who was half-and-half would only "half die"? It makes more "sense" to me that Jesus OBEDIENTLY went to the cross BELIEVING that his Father would raise him rather than his KNOWING that God would raise him. Otherwise, it cheapens the events of Easter for me. If Jesus was not capable of dying, does that make the sacrifice less meaningful? If scripture has any meaning, it should encourage ME when I face death or it is a vain tale without meaning. Like Lazarus, Jesus was in the tomb for three days to show the power of God? IF Jesus was "all God" it would not be possible for Him to "die", would it? Was God "cheating" us if Jesus could not suffer and die like those he came to "save"? After all, why worry about "salvation" if there is no afterlife? Salvation means the forgiveness of sin and the acceptance of my spirit BACK into the presence of God for all eternity? Logically (my logic), Jesus had to "take the risk" and BELIEVE without KNOWING that God would raise Him up from the grave or it was no "sacrifice" and the scripture is cheapened. In order for the "gift of Jesus" to be "real", Jesus had to die so that WE can have HOPE of our resurrection WHEN WE DIE or there is little reason to respect God or Jesus. If it was all done with "smoke and mirrors", then why would we believe? It is our FAITH in the validity of the Easter story that gives us HOPE of our resurrection. We KNOW that we will die but, we BELIEVE that we will be resurrected. ***"For God so LOVED the world that He GAVE his only begotten SON that, whosoever BELIEVES in HIM should not PERISH but, have eternal life (resurrection)."***

In this is our HOPE and our FAITH or we are “hopeless” and wasting our time on earth and abstaining from sin is stupid. Did the Epicureans have it right? We cannot EARN the LOVE of God. It is a “gift”. Our problem is to understand the true depth of the “gift” that was given at Calvary. We can read that even the Apostles and family of Jesus did not fully understand the “gift”. These scriptures are written so that we can learn and believe. Christmas is for children. Easter is for adults. Read, study and learn just how special the crucifixion and resurrection are for us who believe.

The Lectionary Readings for the week: See below

Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Whew! Am I glad that “God shows no partiality?” Americans often think that God is OUR GOD and belongs to our geography and form of government. A recent vote in the Republican Party was to declare that “America is a Christian nation”. This is counter to everything that our Founding Fathers fought to prevent. Constantine tried to tie Christianity to his Roman government with disastrous results. We might make the same mistake by pushing the issue. Americans MAY be Christians but, it does not mean that ONLY Christians can be “good Americans”. What our Constitution guarantees is my PERSONAL FREEDOM TO CHOOSE to believe whatever I want. I have chosen to be a Christian. Not by force or by law but, by conscientiously studying and having a personal relationship with my Creator. That is what INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM truly is. If God is not partial, why should my government be preferential? But, I digress... This passage refers backwards to the story of the “baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River” in which God anointed Christ with the Holy Spirit and he began His earthly ministry. When did I “get the Holy Spirit” so I could “begin MY ministry”? Peter is encapsulating the “Jesus story” for his audience in order to show the divinity of Christ. He ends his discourse with a promise of “receiving forgiveness of sins through his name.” Do we truly believe the “Jesus

story” as proposed by Peter? IF it does not evolve into a “personal” relationship with our Father, it is just a “story” with a happy ending suitable only for children. The four Gospels were written to give us “eye-witness” accounts of the earthly events of the ministry of Jesus. Do we believe the witnesses? What stories would you and I tell to support our “belief in Jesus”? They “saw” Jesus, walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, ate with Jesus and were there at his crucifixion and resurrection. They “saw” the resurrected Jesus and many still did not believe. Unless each of us has a “personal” relationship with Jesus in our lives, unless we “reflect” that faith, unless we “act like Jesus” and “live like Jesus”, we are living lies to say we “believe in Jesus”. Remember, it is our FAITH in Christ as God’s Son, his death and resurrection that gives us HOPE of salvation. (I know, Bill, it is HOPE until it happens.) Faith through GRACE saves us by our FAITH in Jesus that God will “raise” us like he did his own Son. This proves that God is “impartial” and “no respecter of persons”. Was Christ all God, all human or “half-and-half”?

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 Page 760, BCP

Confitemini Domino

1

***Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; *
his mercy endures for ever.***

2

***Let Israel now proclaim, *
"His mercy endures for ever."***

14

***The LORD is my strength and my song, *
and he has become my salvation.***

15

***There is a sound of exultation and victory *
in the tents of the righteous:***

16

***"The right hand of the LORD has triumphed! *
the right hand of the LORD is exalted!
the right hand of the LORD has triumphed!"***

17

***I shall not die, but live, *
and declare the works of the LORD.***

18

***The LORD has punished me sorely, *
but he did not hand me over to death.***

19

***Open for me the gates of righteousness; *
I will enter them;***

3

- 20 *I will offer thanks to the LORD.*
- 21 *"This is the gate of the LORD; *
he who is righteous may enter."*
- 22 *I will give thanks to you, for you answered me *
and have become my salvation.*
- 23 *The same stone which the builders rejected *
has become the chief cornerstone.*
- 24 *This is the LORD'S doing, *
and it is marvelous in our eyes.*
- 24 *On this day the LORD has acted; *
we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Is this a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion? Is it a prophecy of His resurrection? Be careful about declaring "prophecy" in retrospect. The psalmist was obviously speaking of HIS present situation and we have stretched it to mean what we choose for it to mean. It was a "glad day" for the psalmist and God received the praise.

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Do we HOPE only in THIS mortal life? Is that how we live? Is "this" all there is? Is there nothing beyond the grave? This has been a question on the mind of mankind since we have recorded our thoughts and ideas. Cultures have dealt with the reality of death and the possibility of an "afterlife" since mankind first faced the "permanence" of death. We KNOW that all of us will die. We do not KNOW what happens after we die, do we? Paul is obviously dealing with this most personal of questions in the cited passage from 1 Corinthians. What is his answer? He used an analogy of "fruit" to describe that, if Jesus was raised, he is only the "first fruit" to be obvious from God's mercy and bounty. IF God can give

life, take away life and create life, surely God can restore life, can't God? When will "our resurrection" occur? Paul thought and believed that it would occur at some distant date AFTER Christ had conquered all his "enemies". The LAST enemy that would be conquered would be "death". Once "death" is defeated, WE will be restored to life. The question is "What will that LIFE be like?" So far, I don't have KNOWLEDGE of what that life will be but, I do "believe" that it will be better than THIS LIFE and that is very hopeful. The body dies but, the Spirit within us NEVER dies? One day, all our questions will be answered. For now, we must TRUST GOD and live lives of HOPE, LOVE and anticipation for God to KEEP THE PROMISE. If anyone purports to "understand" the afterlife, let them first "tell the future" with reliability and answer my "questions" with KNOWLEDGE. God alone knows the "truth" and I must TRUST in God that "this is not all there is." My belief system is best supported by the story of Christ's Easter resurrection.

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told

them that he had said these things to her.

If you ever had a question of why we have Easter “sunrise services”, you have your answer in: **“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,...”** I believe that God can receive my worship just as well at 10:30 as He can at 5 a.m. but, that’s just my opinion and I could be wrong. Mary, Peter and John obviously did not “expect” the Lord to have been resurrected despite his foretelling the events of the week. They thought that someone had stolen the body. Mary brought two men along to roll away the heavy stone door but, someone had already opened the tomb. To their utter surprise, they found the tomb empty. Seeing the burial clothes and the “veil” neatly folded and rolled, they believed that Jesus had been raised. The guys even left the tomb and “returned to their homes”. Mary stayed to weep and encountered the ‘risen Lord who spoke to her. At first, Mary did not recognize the Lord and confused Him with the gardener. Only when he spoke her NAME did she recognize Jesus. At the command of Christ, Mary went to the others and gave them the good news of the resurrection. What was the “good news” that Mary delivered? Is her declaration “good news” to you and me? That is the ultimate question of Easter: “IS JESUS ALIVE?” This passage is also recorded in the Book of Luke who recorded the events as described by the witnesses. These many centuries distant from the events of Easter morning, we must ask “So what does it mean to me?” Well, what does it mean to us? It means that God raised His Son because of His obedience? Does it mean that you and I have the HOPE of resurrection and that “this life” is NOT all there is? YES, that is exactly what it means. Because of the “resurrection of Easter morning”, we have HOPE of being resurrected and returning to “our Father and our God.” That is truly good news and an answer to many of our questions about our death, our resurrection and our ascension to the Father. Like the Ripley’s announcer asks at the end of every program, “Believe it, or not.” To put it in Texas terms: “Our resurrection is the biscuit and the afterlife is the gravy.” Easter morning, I think I’ll have biscuits and gravy just to engrave this into my mind. Christ is raised, praise God. Christ is raised, indeed.