

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, August 15, 2010

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

The Fires of Restoration

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This week's Lectionary readings:

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

In my readings this week, I came across a "factoid" that might help us put things into perspective: there are only FOUR women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, Ruth, Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba. Note that one was a widow who was an alien in a strange land, one was raped and abused by her brother (2 Samuel 13), one was a prostitute and one was an adulteress. God CAN use ALL of us for a purpose greater than ourselves. Through our faith, God can "perfect" EACH of us into a useable "vessel" of service to a cause greater than ourselves. "Faith is the SUBSTANCE of things HOPE FOR and the EVIDENCE of things NOT SEEN." All it takes is a change of our "attitude" from "self" into "God's tool/instrument of purposeful service". Keep that in mind as we think our lives unimportant and of no value. Faith both empowers us and motivates us into action. Faith is often as simple as "doing the NEXT thing." Faith allows us to see a purpose for living and to be "perfected" into the LIFE for which we were created. This I believe and this I attempt to cling to in times of despair. Through God's grace and our "attitude", it is in the "fires" of daily stresses that we find our faith and our purpose for living.

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved

my love-song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard

on a very fertile hill.

He dug it and cleared it of stones,

and planted it with choice vines;

he built a watchtower in the midst of it,

and hewed out a wine vat in it;

he expected it to yield grapes,

but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem

and people of Judah,

judge between me

and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?
And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

The metaphors of the Hebrew prophets are most interesting and often are patterned after the agricultural society upon which they are based. Gardeners know that, in order for a garden to be productive, it must be tended by frequent, regular labor. An untended garden is neither pretty nor productive. The People of Israel were “God’s vineyard” and the people of Judah were his “pleasant planting” or “flower garden”. They disappointed God because they planted and produced bloodshed instead of justice and weeping instead of righteousness. How would God find our “gardens”? This is reflexive of “we reap what we sow”. Our “faith garden” needs constant tending so that “weeds of despair” do not overwhelm us. I have to work constantly to keep doubt, fear and depression from choking out my faith, my hope and my optimism (faith for the future). I feel certain that I am not alone in this. Pray that God will help us all be “Constant Gardeners”.

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18 Page 702, 703, BCP

Qui regis Israel = “Who rules Israel?” (Who “rules” or, is Lord of you and me?)”

1

***Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; *
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.***

2

***In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, *
stir up your strength and come to help us.***

8

***You have brought a vine out of Egypt; *
you cast out the nations and planted it.***

9

***You prepared the ground for it; *
it took root and filled the land.***

10

***The mountains were covered by its shadow *
and the towering cedar trees by its boughs.***

11

***You stretched out its tendrils to the Sea *
and its branches to the River.***

12

***Why have you broken down its wall, *
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?***

13

***The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it, *
and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.***

14

***Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;
behold and tend this vine; *
preserve what your right hand has planted.***

15

***They burn it with fire like rubbish; *
at the rebuke of your countenance let them perish.***

16

***Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, *
the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.***

17

***And so will we never turn away from you; *
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.***

18

***Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.***

There is a popular “movement” in Texas to “restore” many parcels of our land to

“its original state”. We have not been good stewards of our land and it has become an “unpleasant garden” to many of us. The U.S. Soil Conservation Service did maps and surveys of most of Texas in the 1950’s in which they described the soils, the terrain and the plants that occupied those particular spaces. This data is a wonderful source of information about how the land “looked” fifty years ago. To what condition should the lands be restored? The same question might be asked of our “spiritual gardens”. What “ideal” should we use as a template for “perfection”? When will we KNOW that we have attained “perfection”? Like our faith, restoration takes work and diligence to achieve our goal. First, we must have the motivation for change (conviction that are no longer in control) then the desire to change (repentance, a pledge to change) followed by the ACTION (the WORK of restoration). Anything of value is worthy of our best efforts to achieve our intended state of mind or salvation. Why does scripture implore us to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling”? Confucius says, “A journey of a million miles begins with a single step.” Ergo, a CHANGE OF ATTITUDE is primal to our increasing our FAITH. Faith begins when we come to the end of our “try” and realize we cannot, by our own strength or intellect, achieve our vision of salvation. Faith, through grace, is our “Energizer Bunny” that jumpstarts us into action when we give up and let God take over. Believe me when I say that I struggle daily in my efforts to “let go and let God” teach me what I need to learn from every experience in my life. Look over my shoulder, read my verbiage and share with me the struggles that challenge me and humble me. Please remember that these writings are only MY OPINION and not “gospel”. Be patient with me and I will be patient with you as we travel together toward the “PRIZE of the high calling” we all seek.

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented-- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Paul's method of teaching relies upon a recounting of stories from scripture of "Bible heroes" and how they overcame insurmountable obstacles in their "faith journeys". The important point he tries to make is that the "heroes" were not "special" other than their tremendous FAITH and TRUST in the goodness and faithfulness of God. Their life stories are merely TESTAMENTS to their faith to INCREASE OUR FAITH. Their "testimonies" form a "cloud of witnesses" that substantiates their FAITH even though they never got to see the "promise" fulfilled during their lifetimes. Beginning with the "therefore", Paul preaches a "pep talk" for us to keep on going (perseverance) despite the odds. WE may never see our faith fulfilled or our prayers answered in our lifetimes. If Jesus trusted God, endured the cross, disregarded its shame and was seated at the right hand of God, he was our "hero" and example of "faith in action". Do we trust God to keep promises? Faith is nothing more or less than trusting God to keep his promise of salvation at a time and place of God's choosing. Our "job" is to "keep on running the race" and let God show us the "finish line". My problem is that I often look around to see how I'm doing in relation to those who are also running the race. How foolish can I be? I must realize that I am running my OWN RACE and how I RUN is all that matters. God is "no respecter of persons" so all are "equipped" and "able" to finish the race IF they are willing to compete for the prize. Will some be given "special privilege"? Will some "be created more able to run" than I? My "job" is to focus on "getting ME to the finish line" and let God be the judge of how I RAN. I can encourage others WHILE I AM RUNNING. There is no place for being "spectators" in this race.

Luke 12:49-56

Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:

father against son

and son against father,

mother against daughter

and daughter against mother,

***mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."***

He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

One can find himself/herself in scripture if one can find a "catchword" to allow us to insert our minds into the stream of thought in a passage. I almost laughed out loud with this one. I am running to be Hays County Judge. All Texas counties have a "Commissioners Court" with FIVE members: four commissioners and ONE Judge with each getting ONE vote. To do anything at court, a plurality (three to two) vote is necessary. Most of the intrigue at Court is based on a split vote of three to two for, or against, any issue. "Unanimous votes" are so rare that they beg the question of whether a discussion and vote were even necessary. This "split vote" is so common that it is "normal" in courts, families and churches. IF two people totally agree on every issue, ONE of them is unnecessary or brain-dead. Is Jesus "preaching" division for division's sake or is He merely describing the human condition? I think that Jesus is merely asking each of us to MAKE A CHOICE of whether we will follow Him or not. If you want to cause "division" in any group, just start talking religion or politics. Political Parties are based on people's MAKING A CHOICE and hard-headedly clinging to an ideology. Do we do the same in our churches? I guess "independents" are those who have chosen to NOT CHOOSE? Jesus tells us that "not choosing" IS a choice. I am reminded of the famous jurist who said, "It is Christians like YOU that make me an atheist." The "convert" is one who has chosen to leave one life vision and to "repent" (turn a 180 degree turn) and follow a "new course in life". No true "repentance" can occur until WE CHOOSE. What has been our choice? Did we let someone else make the choice for us? Did our parents "choose" our "religion"? Did our parents "choose" our profession or our mate? How has that worked for you? IF you are an adult, YOU GET TO CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF without any guilt whatsoever. Just be aware that not everyone will agree with YOUR choice or be happy that you did not choose the same as they. IF you don't choose, you are still letting someone else "run" your life. Choosing requires FAITH and COURAGE. Jesus says, "Make a choice even knowing that it may cause division because, IF God gave his only Son to save the world and they don't choose salvation, don't be surprised that they reject you for choosing to follow ME." "Choose THIS DAY who you will serve but, for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Yes, choices matter, in fact, they determine our past, our present and our future. Choose wisely.