

## **eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, December 27, 2009**

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

**First Sunday after Christmas 2009**

**“So, other than that, how was the play, Mrs. Lincoln?”**

*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:

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

Psalms 147 or 147:13-21

This week's discussion is most productive when read AFTER Christmas. Did you make some “new Christmas memories”? Did you better appreciate the Christmas “event” because of our study during Advent? Was this Christmas “better” than last year? Did you “get what you wanted or what you NEEDED”? (Some will spend their week “exchanging” the gifts they received for something as worthless as the original.) As a child, I could not wait for Christmas and it seemed to be an eternity between Christmases. Funny how soon it seems to reoccur since I have aged. Now, we get to look forward to 2010 and put 2009 to bed. I suggest that we put the past year behind us and press on with our lives. There are published aphorisms that dwell on this issue: “It’s okay to look backward, just don’t STARE.” Celebrate the good times and reflect on the bad times. “Take no thought for tomorrow for TODAY has its own problems that require your attention.” A “today” lived with purpose will make the “tomorrows” even sweeter. I will have more to say about “New Year’s” and our preparations for its arrival. Why do cartoons show the “New Year” dressed as a baby and the “Old Year” dressed as an “old Grim Reaper”? “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

### **Isaiah 61:10-62:3**

***I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,***

***my whole being shall exult in my God;***

***for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,***

***he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,***

***as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,***

***and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.***

***For as the earth brings forth its shoots,***

***and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,***

***so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise***

***to spring up before all the nations.***

***For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,***

**and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,  
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
and her salvation like a burning torch.  
The nations shall see your vindication,  
and all the kings your glory;  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will give.  
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.**

I find this passage one of delightful poetry. It uses the metaphors of the “clothing” of salvation and righteousness, the wedding rites with the festooned bride and groom in their finery and the earth “decorated” by shoots in a garden. All are reasons for rejoicing to those who understand the blessings that came with the “gift” of Jesus. We have just celebrated Christmas with the exchanging of gifts. The custom of gift-giving has several origins: Chris Cringle, St. Nicolas, Hanukkah, the Magi and many others. The bestowing of “gifts” has a long history woven through the tapestry of many “religions”; even those some consider “pagan”. There is a “mystery” involved in “gift-giving” that I do not fully understand. It has even become an aphorism: “It is more blessed to give than receive.” Has that been your experience? My wife and I go through this every year: “What do you want for Christmas?” I am the hardest person in the world for whom to buy a present. I have everything a man could want. (These are definitely NOT in their order of importance) I have a dependable truck, a loving wife, two great dogs, great kids, the best daughters-in-law, wonderful grandkids, lots of “toys”, lots of friends, all the clothes I need, plenty to eat, good health, a comfortable home, a good job, a loving church family, etc. What in the world could I need? Oh, and, I have a blessed Savior who has “paid it all”. What do you give a man who has “everything”? NOTHING! I have found that APPRECIATING all that I am blessed with also blesses the source of all good things, GOD. I give God all the credit for every good thing in my life. BUT, because I have been so blessed, it makes me WANT to bless others. All who have been so blessed are to be conduits of God’s blessing to those who have yet to be blessed. Perhaps WE ARE THE BLESSING MANY NEED? It is a “cop out” to think that we “earned” anything. I have found that “luck” favors the prepared mind. This is what Isaiah is professing to the recipients of his poetry: God has blessed us beyond measure so that the world can see our “vindication” and we may become “a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, a royal diadem (crown) in the hand of your God.” Our very LIVES are to show the love of God and bless others while giving the glory to the source of our vindication, our Father in Heaven. This passage from Isaiah is reflexive of ***“Let your LIGHT so shine that others will SEE your good works AND glorify the Father which is in Heaven.”*** Those who have been “vindicated”, found innocent of our sins because of the “savior”, are compelled to bless others BECAUSE of our salvation. JOY, blessing and forgiveness reach their highest point when they are

PASSED ON to others. This is the “ideal” of Isaiah. I am not there yet but, be patient with me. God is not through with refining me.

**Psalm 147 or 147:13-21 Page 804 or 805, BCP**

*Laudate Dominum is Latin for “Praise the Lord”*

1

***Hallelujah!***

***How good it is to sing praises to our God! \*  
how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!***

2

***The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem; \*  
he gathers the exiles of Israel.***

3

***He heals the brokenhearted \*  
and binds up their wounds.***

4

***He counts the number of the stars \*  
and calls them all by their names.***

5

***Great is our LORD and mighty in power; \*  
there is no limit to his wisdom.***

6

***The LORD lifts up the lowly, \*  
but casts the wicked to the ground.***

7

***Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; \*  
make music to our God upon the harp.***

8

***He covers the heavens with clouds \*  
and prepares rain for the earth;***

9

***He makes grass to grow upon the mountains \*  
and green plants to serve mankind.***

10

***He provides food for flocks and herds \*  
and for the young ravens when they cry.***

11

***He is not impressed by the might of a horse; \*  
he has no pleasure in the strength of a man;***

12

***But the LORD has pleasure in those who fear him, \*  
in those who await his gracious favor.***

3

13

***Worship the LORD, O Jerusalem; \*  
praise your God, O Zion;***

14

***For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; \*  
he has blessed your children within you.***

15

***He has established peace on your borders; \*  
he satisfies you with the finest wheat.***

16

***He sends out his command to the earth, \*  
and his word runs very swiftly.***

17

***He gives snow like wool; \*  
he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.***

18

***He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; \*  
who can stand against his cold?***

19

***He sends forth his word and melts them; \*  
he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.***

20

***He declares his word to Jacob, \*  
his statutes and his judgments to Israel.***

21

***He has not done so to any other nation; \*  
to them he has not revealed his judgments.  
**Hallelujah!*****

What is the psalmist trying to “say” in this psalm? He starts out praising God and quickly switches to enumerating the things that God does IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD. Next, the psalmist turns to “safety” and what God has done to protect his “children”. The blessings flow to those who OBEY the statutes of the Lord? Oral Roberts, God rest his soul, made a life and a fortune preaching his “prosperity gospel” a.k.a. “Name it and claim it”. The psalmist reminds the Israelites that they are “favored people” in the eyes of God but, the blessings are dependent on their obedience to god’s precepts. Remember, this was the state of GRACE prior to the advent of Jesus. What has changed? Is God still in charge of the physical world? Does God bless me depending on my works of “merit” or “good works”? Does God still “directly” control the weather? Did the “lack of knowledge of scientific principles” cloud the psalmist’s judgment? Does God control the weather or does mankind? If mankind “ruins” the environment, can mankind fix it? How egotistical to think that mankind can “make it rain”,

“make it snow” or “change the planet’s weather”? We have to decide: Is the status of the world our responsibility or is it God’s? Have we been appointed “stewards” of GOD’S CREATION to keep it and make it a “garden”? It is a very fine line, theologically, between “stewardship” and “taking over control”. The debate rages on with no end in sight. Is the “change of weather” caused by the actions of mankind? The “facts” are confusing. The data is contradictory. A few years ago we were all going to die because of “a coming Ice Age”. Now, we are told that the “earth is getting hotter and we will all drown”? As the “subject” of a “sovereign Lord”, I pray for discernment and guidance. How should the “redeemed” react to the “news”? I’ll let the reader make their own decisions about the issues. Is the “weather” tied to obedience and praise to the Creator? What has changed since the “advent” of Jesus? The Christian tries to “see the world” and all that is in it through “God’s eyes”. I ask my “born again” readers to try to see both sides of every “issue” and ask “What would Jesus do?” I believe that Jesus would “talk to his Father and follow His advice.” Would that be a good start to common sense solutions? If one deigns to study world history, one would find that the world has NEVER been “black and white”. Personally, I have discovered that many issues are often “Hound’s-tooth”.

### **Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7**

**Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.**

**But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.**

As previously discussed, the Hebrew word “Abba” is the masculine personal (familiar) form of address which could be translated as “Daddy”, “Poppa” or “Poppy”. It is the form a child would use to address their adult male parent: Father. My grandchildren call me “Poppy” and it melts my heart. What do yours call you? Since Jesus uses this “form of address” toward God, this is a roundabout way of saying Jesus has a relationship with “his Father” and is God’s Son. This passage describes the relationship that a child has toward his parents before reaching adulthood. On several occasions, my adult children have called to say, “You were right” about many things I tried to teach them. Those are precious words to any parent. I believe that Jesus’ use of “Abba” implies just such a loving relationship with God. Mankind (men, women and children), prior to the Torah, were a wild and crazy bunch of “animals” who did everything the Torah condemns. The “uneducated” need EXACT rules that lack “wiggle room”. (Several times, I have heard my parents’ words that I swore to never say to my child, coming out of MY MOUTH. When that happens (it’s as certain as the

sunrise), YOU have become the parent you learned from YOUR parents.) The “uneducated” small child NEEDS the discipline of RULES: the Torah Law was a beginning of “civilized relationships” with God AND each other. “Don’t touch that, it’s HOT”, for example as in “Thou SHALL NOT worship another god.” BUT, the ADULT child knows the rules and IS PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE for THEIR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS. (My definition of “adulthood” is WHEN you have learned and experienced enough of life to FORGIVE YOUR PARENTS because you realize that they were probably doing the best they could.) Adults who know the law but choose to ignore it are called “sociopaths”. Prisons and governments are full of such persons who choose to “not follow the rules” because they think themselves “above the law”. The “child” has been given a “framework” of principles by the loving “parent” to guide them through into “adulthood”. As stated in scripture, ***“The Law (Torah) was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.”*** The Torah was intended for teaching us the basic “rules” for a successful and happy life. Jesus lived UNDER THE LAW (Torah) all his life. At the Passover feast with his friends, Jesus instituted a NEW COVENANT: “I am THE sacrifice that was promised. Here, eat this bread and drink this wine and, each time you eat these, REMEMBER that I REDEEMED YOU.” This ties to John’s declaration of ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever BELIEVES IN HIM (accepts Him as Savior) should not perish but have eternal life.”*** The express purpose of His coming was to complete our education by becoming a living sacrifice, dying on the cross and being resurrected so that our FAITH in Jesus as Savior would allow our REDEMPTION from SIN. Our relationship to God changed with the coming of Christ. By our FAITH (agreement with and acceptance of Christ as Savior), we received GRACE and were “adopted”, not for our beauty, not for our “merits” but, for Jesus’ sake. By “putting on Christ”, as in the adornment of the bride in the Isaiah passage, the blood of Christ “covers us” so that when God looks at us, he sees his beloved, obedient Son instead of a sinful creature such as I am. By “putting on Christ” as our “adornment”, we change our “appearance” in God’s eyes. As adopted children of God, we become heirs of the promise made long ago. We are “adopted children” of the Heavenly Father which allows US to call our Father, ABBA. Why would anyone not wish to receive such a “gift” as adoption by God and eternal salvation? I still cling to the mystery: Christ has come, Christ will come AGAIN, praise the Father who has bestowed such grace, love and mercy on me, a wretched sinner. I have expounded upon Paul’s words so that modern ears can hear and understand that WE ARE BOUGHT with a PRICE, the Blood of the Lamb, who willingly gave his body and his blood for you and ME. That is the “true meaning of Christmas”. Have you and I been “redeemed”? YES, now let us go and LIVE LIKE THE ADOPTED CHILDREN OF THE KING OF HEAVEN. Like it says on the Emmaus cross given to me at the end of my “walk”, ***“I am counting on God and God is counting on ME.”*** Keep that in mind when making our “New Year’s resolutions” and it will make our 2010 a better year.

## **John 1:1-18**

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.**

**There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.**

**He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. BUT (my emphasis) to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.**

**And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.**

Textual critics have long questioned the “validity” of the underscored lines in the “paragraph” that begins this passage. Historically, it may have been “inserted” many centuries AFTER the original script by a “scrivener” or “scribe” who was “editing” a COPY of the “original” manuscript. It is beautiful and descriptive of the sentiments of the verses that follow, even IF it was inserted much later. It is one of the most often quoted parts of the Book of John. It almost flows off the tongue and is poetic in its imagery and meaning. I like it no matter who wrote it or when they wrote it. I have more important issues to wrestle with on these pages than the “validity” of certain words and their origins. Here, I recommend the reading of “**Misquoting Jesus**” as a good source of information about textual criticism for the “laity”. The three paragraphs that follow this “introduction” are a synopsis of the life of John the Baptist and Jesus. These paragraphs are “reflexive” of the opening lines as they reiterate the “time line” of history that is most important to the believer. It assumes our understanding that Jesus came into the world to confirm the existence and love of God who sent him with a PURPOSE: God came down to glorify the Father by living among us and to demonstrate the GRACE of GOD who offers to “adopt us” as His children. The Book of John is the book that most often demonstrates the “interpersonal relationships” of individuals to Jesus. Jesus comes to ALL THE WORLD, one at a time. John had a very personal relationship with Jesus and it comes across very clearly in the pages of his Book. The Spirit of God came in the form of a

“helpless baby” and grew up among us so that He could be “in the world” yet NOT OF the world. Did you “see” Jesus in your celebration of Christmas? Did you celebrate and NOT “see” Jesus? We received the most wonderful “gift” that God could give yet, we did not recognize Him. IF Jesus had come to us in the “form” of a great general, a political leader with great oratory skills or a TV evangelist, would we have clamored to Him? His own people denigrated Jesus and did not accept him as Messiah? Those who “accept Jesus” must “receive” Him despite their “human doubt” and be “born of the Spirit”. Don’t blame me. Blame John because HE said it. Jesus came to “show us God”. Have we “seen God”? Have we “seen Jesus”? God, open our eyes, we want to “see Jesus”. President and Mrs. Lincoln went to Ford’s Theater expecting to spend a pleasant evening of diversion from the pressures of their lives in Washington. I remember the play to have been “**Our American Cousin**” but, I could be wrong. They thought that all the “problems” had been solved. Unexpectedly, John Wilkes Booth had another “solution” to the “problems” fulminated by the “War between the States”. In a brief moment, President and Mrs. Lincoln’s lives were changed when Booth entered their theater box. The people in the audience below did not know what had happened until Booth jumped from the box seats onto the stage and said the famous line, “Death to all tyrants.” A lot of people enter and leave our lives. Who has entered your “world” and changed it? Some come and leave blessing. Others come and leave tragedy. Which has the “coming of the Christ Child” brought you? If there has been no change, then, logically He/they never truly “entered your life”. Unless the coming of the Christ Child has caused a demonstrable “change” in our existence, He has really never “come” and Advent holds no “real meaning” for us. Like the theater audience that night in Ford’s Theater, we have merely been “watching a play” and not been “part of the action”. People might ask us, “Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?” Were we PART of the Christmas “scene” or were we merely spectators? As we look forward to the coming year of 2010, what are our plans for “testing” whether we have received the “gift” of Jesus, or not? Not planning is a plan sure to fail. Christmas has come and gone just like every year in our lives. Did we miss the “gift”?

Happy New Year, 2010, to you and yours!  
Lord, hear our prayer.