

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, February 28, 2010

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

### Second Sunday in Lent

#### If Lent is here, can Easter be far behind?

*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:

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

### Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

*The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

*Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

*As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.*

*When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."*

Okay, here is your assignment for the week: interpret this one for ME. What am I supposed to "learn" from reading this passage? Why were the animals "three-years-old"? Why cut the animals "in two" but not the birds? Okay, they were fowl (fowl)? Bad joke, even for me. Why did he scare away the buzzards? (Point of

order: What Americans call “buzzards” are ACTUALLY “vultures”, not “buzzards”. Their proper name is “Turkey VULTURE”.) You might as well learn something useful in these pages. God used this occasion to announce the “promise” to Abraham that he would be receiving a “blessing” of a son, a nation and a ‘promised land’”. The most enigmatic phrase of this passage is “And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (Some translations use the word “imputed” instead of “reckoned”. Both are terms from “accounting” and imply a “balance sheet”.) What does that mean? Does it mean that my FAITH “covers” my UNRIGHTEOUSNESS? Like someone “correcting” their balance sheets, does my righteousness “blot out” my sins? Does it mean that God is “keeping score”? Is that how we “see” God, like some old, bearded man just waiting to “zap” us? Was the “purpose” of Christ’s coming to dispel that image of God and replace it with “God so LOVED the world that he GAVE his only SON...”? My impression is that Abram was scared to death during this meeting with God. How would you and I have acted? **Is it in the “scary moments” of life that we come to know and “RESPECT” God?** Does our ATTITUDE toward God determine the outcome of our “encounters” with God? Why does it say that “a deep sleep FELL upon Abram”? The Jewish “day” began at sunrise and ended at sunset. Why does it say that “On **That Day** (which “day”?) the LORD made a covenant with Abram” and gave him the lands from the Nile to the Euphrates? I guess I need to do more study before discussing these matters. I’ll get back to you and oh, you get back to me AFTER you have decided for yourself. Isn’t scripture study “fun”? Often, it is not the questions without answers that condemn me. The answers are often so obvious that they condemn me or bless me depending on MY ATTITUDE.

### **Psalm 27 Page 617, BCP**

*Dominus illuminatio*

1

**The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom then shall I fear? \*  
the LORD is the strength of my life;  
of whom then shall I be afraid?**

2

**When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, \*  
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who  
stumbled and fell.**

3

**Though an army should encamp against me, \*  
yet my heart shall not be afraid;**

4

**And though war should rise up against me, \*  
yet will I put my trust in him.**

5

**One thing have I asked of the LORD;**

2

*one thing I seek; \*  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days  
of my life;*

6

*To behold the fair beauty of the LORD \*  
and to seek him in his temple.*

7

*For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe  
in his shelter; \*  
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling  
and set me high upon a rock.*

8

*Even now he lifts up my head \*  
above my enemies round about me.*

9

*Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation  
with sounds of great gladness; \*  
I will sing and make music to the LORD.*

10

*Hearken to my voice, O LORD, when I call; \*  
have mercy on me and answer me.*

11

*You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." \*  
Your face, LORD, will I seek.*

12

*Hide not your face from me, \*  
nor turn away your servant in displeasure.*

13

*You have been my helper;  
cast me not away; \*  
do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.*

14

*Though my father and my mother forsake me, \*  
the LORD will sustain me.*

15

*Show me your way, O LORD; \*  
lead me on a level path, because of my enemies.*

16

*Deliver me not into the hand of my adversaries, \*  
for false witnesses have risen up against me,  
and also those who speak malice.*

17

*What if I had not believed*

***that I should see the goodness of the LORD \*  
in the land of the living!***

18

***O tarry and await the LORD'S pleasure;  
be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; \*  
wait patiently for the LORD.***

A favorite saying in my family is, "They may KILL you but, they won't EAT you." Sometimes it feels like I am being "eaten alive". Can you identify with the feeling? It seems that enemies are everywhere and their numbers are growing. The psalmist knew the feeling and put his doubts and fears down for our benefit. His answer was to rely on God for redemption, safety and deliverance. Is that a "good plan" that we can re-enact? I am not a "good waiter" on anyone. I don't have much patience for procrastination unless it is MY procrastination. At some times I may seem paranoid. (I tried attending "Paranoids Anonymous" but they wouldn't tell me where they met.) Are my enemies "real" or are they just in my mind? Does it matter? An assumed threat, biologically, causes the same "flight or fight" reaction whether "real" or "unreal". What our mind creates is felt in our physiology. Have you ever been the victim of "false witnesses"? Often, a rumor is more hurtful than the truth. In politics, an accusation that is not dispelled within 24 hours is assumed to be true. YOU have seen many "infomercials" that attempt to cover a previous lie or misstatement made by a candidate. Fortunes are spent trying to respond to falsehoods or half-truths. Are "facts" also as hurtful as "lies" when used in a hurtful way? These are the arguments that I have with myself when engaged in a campaign. At the end of our lives, all we have "left over" is our "good name" or "bad name". That last verse, verse 18, could be interpreted and translated into "Revenge is a dish best served cold." IF we tarry in our anger, are we more "justified" in our anger? "Count to ten". How far would one "go" to protect one's "good name"? If we have to defend it, is it really a "good name"? Today, perception has become reality and we elect idiots to office because we choose our elected officials based on flowery speeches and matinee idol good looks. Remember, even a corpse may "look good". Discernment may lead us to look deeper for truth and honesty in our elected officials. What do we see when we look into our mirrors? IF we look into our mirror and see a "bad attitude" looking back at us, remember that the only thing in this life that we control is our "attitude" ABOUT life and our circumstances. Again, I am preaching to myself in the hope that it might help others by discussing my struggles. If life were "good as Heaven", none of us would ever give up life and we would "miss Heaven". The greatest gift my father gave me at his death was a "good name". I hope to do the same for my sons. It is an awesome task for any parent.

**Philippians 3:17-4:1**

***Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the***

**cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.**

Every “family” must perforce have a “black sheep”. Apparently, some in Philippi were becoming “gray” as they soiled themselves with worldly behaviors. The behaviors are not described in detail but, whatever their problems, Paul was “against them”. Paul appeals to the Philippians to imitate him and his “example”. Are we “enemies of the cross of Christ”? What does that mean to you? Remember that Paul is speaking to those who he had “converted” to Christianity. HOW WE LIVE is how we become “enemies of the cross of Christ”. Our attitudes can make us enemies of Christ. We must be either “fish” or “fowl”. There is no “middle ground” in Christianity or, is there? Either we attain to becoming a DISCIPLE of Christ and seek to imitate his love and mercy or we “deny” that Christ is LORD of our lives. Which are we? What is our attitude toward the wonderful gift that God gave us...his ONLY SON? Do I feel “forgiven”? Do I fully appreciate the gift of Jesus? Paul was more disappointed than angry toward the Philippians. Did these Christians really become “enemies of the cross of Christ”? IF Jesus is NOT the hope of our lives, and we live our lives in ways that do not show that Jesus is LORD of our lives, do we become enemies of Christ’s cross? How can we become “enemies” of an inanimate object...a cross of wood? IF we deny the sacrifice that the cross of Christ represents for OUR salvation, IF we don’t accept the grace and mercy that God offered through Christ, do we become “enemies of the cross of Christ?” Paul believed that the “second coming” would allow US to become “citizens of heaven” with all the “rights and privileges” it represents. Heaven, as used here, is the “heavenly abode” or, where God and Christ “dwell”. What believer would not want to enter the “heavenly abode” and become “full citizens”. Paul knew the benefits of being a “citizen” of the Roman Empire. One became a Roman citizen by being born to A Roman citizen, having citizenship bestowed by the Emperor as reward for some patriotic deed OR one could “buy citizenship” and become a full-fledged citizen of Rome. How do we become “citizens of heaven”? Jesus PAID the price for our potential citizenship ON THE CROSS with his body and blood. The cross became the “emblem” of Christianity because it is the ONE symbol around which ALL believers can center their faith. Without the cross and the resurrection, there is no HOPE, no SALVATION, no REDEMPTION and NO HEAVEN available to you and me. Embrace the cross and cling to it as it is the anchor that steadies us in this world of tempest-tossed lives. One thing we don’t want to be is “an enemy of the cross of Christ”.

**Luke 13:31-35**

***Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"***

We forget that JESUS lived as A PHARISEE. Paul WAS A PHARISEE. How did "Pharisaical" become a derogatory word? The Pharisees were "lawyers" in that they KNEW the Torah very well and could interpret its meaning for those who had questions. Is it appropriate to say they were "know-it-alls"? How many times in scripture do we see the Pharisees trying to "trick" Jesus by the use of the "Law"? No one "knows-it-all", trust me on this one. The Pharisees were "out of luck" because there is simply too much to know about any one subject. I spend hours every day just trying to keep up in ONE field of medicine. BUT, Jesus, being "divine", KNEW all about his Father and could see with His Father's eyes and heart. The Pharisees came to warn him to "get out of town" because Herod was looking to kill him. Why would Herod want to kill Jesus? Jesus was a "practicing Pharisee" and kept the "Law" better than any of those who tried to obey the "Law". What he was doing was "Law-ful" by every definition EXCEPT for the "leaders of the Jews". People in power are seldom willing to give up their "power" and "control" to anyone. People LOVE power, money and control even if they don't deserve it. Herod was a puppet of the Romans and his sole source of power was his ability to keep the Jewish people "under control" to prevent rebellion against Rome. In fact, Herod was NOT a full-blooded Jew. Okay, under Jewish tradition, a child of a Jewish woman is considered a "Jew" but Herod was a "half-blood" and on shaky ground with the "real Jews". Jesus was seen as a threat to Herod's power with the Jewish people and his position with the Romans. Jesus never actually threatened Herod but the facts seldom matter to the power-hungry people of this world. History repeats itself every day. Jesus' plea toward the City of Jerusalem is a plea of "what might have been". God sent prophets and messengers to Jerusalem to redeem it and restore its relationship with the Father but, they would not "hear of it". The imagery of the mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wing for protection is most apt. Once again, Jerusalem rejected the one sent to save her. This time it was the Father's Son who was sent but, still, they rejected Him. Jesus did not run away. One thing about "running away from problems" is that, when we get to wherever we think we can hide, the problem has beaten us there because we "take them with us". In psychiatry, this is called "the geographic cure" and it never works for long. The key is to "deal with problems" where we are and when they happen. Even in spiritual matters, it is foolish to "kick the can down the street". Most of us

can look “down the street” and face a sea of cans awaiting us. Jesus stayed until his “ministry” was complete and prophesied the event of “Palm Sunday” when Jerusalem would welcome him with “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” We wait upon the LORD and our remembrance of the price that Jesus paid for you and me. If LENT is here, can Easter be far behind?