

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, January 10, 2010

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

Imagine what we will “know” at the end of this year.

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Isaiah 43:1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

It is always more convenient to believe what people have told us than to examine the “facts” for ourselves. Medicine is dosed via a teaspoon or an injection but, KNOWLEDGE has to be chewed and digested to be of any nutrient value. It is the DUTY of the adult to “test” everything they read, see or hear for the truth. It is a sad fact of the educational process that “You cannot teach someone anything they THINK they already KNOW.” In this year, we will once again wade deeply into the waters of scripture and trust that God will not let us drown. God WANTS to be known by his children but, God wants us to know the TRUTH. What is the “truth”? Ah, that is the rub, is it not? Truth does not change BUT our understanding of the “truth” will change throughout our lives. Unless we test the information to which we are exposed, how can we know what is the “truth”? DO NOT BELIEVE ME. I do not have “all the answers”. Keep your own counsel. THINK for yourself. My goal is to teach the reader to THINK independently within the constraints of the “truth”. Remember, what we read in scripture is often OPINION and not “FACT”. Scripture is full of the opinions of others and how THEY met and understood the relationship between God and His children. Each must study to find a PERSONAL understanding of “truth” and establish a personal relationship with our Creator. Many who never read or heard scripture have a better understanding of the true nature of God than many in the “clergy”. One does not attend seminary to “learn about God”. One attends seminary to “learn HOW to learn about God.” Think of these discussions as “Walmart seminary”. God speaks to us in various ways. God speaks in nature, in other fellow beings and in our “inner voice”. Read these discussions but do not take them as “gospel” or “scripture” in the canonical sense. “Work out your OWN salvation with fear (respect) and trembling.” OR “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of TRUTH.” There is nothing in scripture that need be feared. All that is written is for our encouragement, edification and education. I’m on your side and want you to KNOW what you KNOW because you have experienced it and THOUGHT about it. I KNOW God loves me because I HAVE EXPERIENCED IT. Trust in the love of God and that Jesus speaks the truth in the statement

“Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.” I point out that SEEKING and KNOCKING both require ACTION on our part. Imagine what we will “know” at the end of this year.

Isaiah 43:1-7

Thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,

Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my sight,

and honored, and I love you,

I give people in return for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

Do not fear, for I am with you;

I will bring your offspring from the east,

and from the west I will gather you;

I will say to the north, "Give them up,"

and to the south, "Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away

and my daughters from the end of the earth--

everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made."

This is Isaiah's clarion call to the restoration and redemption of the People of Israel. Could he also have been talking about all those who have been "separated" from God's presence? Was he only speaking of the Jews? Was he talking about "literal" water and fire? How can we apply this scripture to our lives? Perhaps, this was an incarnation of the promise of God to call ALL of mankind to redemption? Perhaps, this passage denotes that God has always had a "plan" to return His children to His presence? Some days, I find the message obvious. Today is not one of those days so, I press on.

Psalm 29 Page 620, BCP

Afferte Domino= "Ascribe to the Lord"

1

***Ascribe to the LORD, you gods, *
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.***

2

***Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his Name; *
worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.***

3

***The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders; *
the LORD is upon the mighty waters.***

4

***The voice of the LORD is a powerful voice; *
the voice of the LORD is a voice of splendor.***

5

***The voice of the LORD breaks the cedar trees; *
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon;***

6

***He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, *
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.***

7

***The voice of the LORD splits the flames of fire;
the voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; *
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.***

8

***The voice of the LORD makes the oak trees writhe *
and strips the forests bare.***

9

***And in the temple of the LORD *
all are crying, "Glory!"***

10

***The LORD sits enthroned above the flood; *
the LORD sits enthroned as King for evermore.***

11

***The LORD shall give strength to his people; *
the LORD shall give his people the blessing of peace.***

Nice psalm but, it did not "speak to me" today. I tried but, I just couldn't hear anything, not a peep. You listen and tell me what you "heard". The Psalms are like that...they "speak" to those who need them AT THE TIME. They are poetry that "ascribe" to the receptive heart. Apparently, mine is scabbed over today. Maybe, by Sunday, I will be able to "hear" the message? As I write, I am having the V and D of "flu" so, maybe it's the drugs? No, flu is not contagious via the internet, thank God. I was just "keeping it real" as promised.

Acts 8:14-17

When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

An understanding of the politics of the time of this writing might be helpful. Here is a brief synopsis: The “northern” tribes of Israel had been “carried off into bondage” and had returned “home” to become “Samaria”. They were considered “non-Jews” by the Judeans because of their being “tainted” during their captivity. The “southern” tribes of Benjamin and Judah became “Judea” and considered themselves superior or “real Jews”. (Remember the Apostles’ reaction when Jesus dared talk to the “woman at the well” in Samaria?) Jesus used this prejudice to teach a lesson in humility by making the “hero” (a “Samaritan”) of his parabolic story the “Good SAMARITAN”. Even JESUS could not convince the Judeans of the value of the Samaritans. Keep this in mind when trying to parse the cited passage. The Apostles, all from Judea and ensconced in Jerusalem, naturally thought of the Samaritans as “unworthy” of receiving the Holy Spirit and sent Peter and John to “give them the Holy Spirit.” Yes, there is racial and ethnic bias even in scripture. The “victors” get to write the history books and set the policy. This same attitude about racial superiority caused a great controversy among the early Christians who believed that any who accepted Christ must first become “Jewish” as a prerequisite of being “Christians”. Also, it was PETER who was sent, after his vision on the rooftop to preach to the Gentiles. Even though GOD TOLD him to preach to the Gentiles, it did not “sit well” with the folks in Jerusalem and led to the “Jerusalem Conference” to settle the matter. How many times have we been “forced” into doing what we swore we would never do because God called us into action? It should teach us two lessons: never “swear” and never say “never”. For me, this passage opens a whole “new can of worms”. IF the Holy Spirit can be conveyed by the “laying on of hands” and does not come because of the act of baptism, WHO can “give me the Holy Spirit”? Was this a “special case” because it was Peter and John who had a “special dispensation” because they were Apostles? If the “presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit is the ‘mark’ of salvation”, why is baptism considered so “necessary” for “salvation”? So, again, what is the “purpose” of baptism IF it does not convey the Holy Spirit to the one being “baptized”? Since Luke wrote most of the Book of Acts, maybe John’s gospel will clear it up for me or, maybe Luke’s gospel? Let’s take a “look-see”.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his

sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form LIKE a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Read it again. This is why it is foolhardy to "quote Paul to prove Paul" or to "quote Luke to prove Luke". At least Luke is consistent in his opinion. Is it "perfectly clear" to you now? John the Baptist said that "his baptism" was not the important "baptism" because it did not "baptize with the Holy Spirit". Have you and I been "baptized with the Holy Spirit"? It all depends on the meaning of "with", doesn't it? I don't recall any "fire" at my or your baptism, do you? Luke, the physician gospel writer, uses "exact" Greek to describe the "descending of the Holy Spirit upon the 'newly-baptized' Jesus" as "in BODILY FORM like a dove." This accounts for the depiction of the dove in so much of "religious" art when the subject is the Holy Spirit. Remember that, in Acts Chapter 2, the Holy Spirit was described AS "tongues of fire" on the heads of the Disciples. The LIKE in this verse and the AS in the Acts passages denote a simile and not a specific actor or action. A simile is a literary tool in which one "noun" or "action word" that is KNOWN is COMPARED to another "noun" or "action word" without implying equality between the two. It is seldom used in logic because of its easy misinterpretation. For example, "I'm as hungry as a lion" or "He's as slow as molasses" or "He's crazy like a fox" or "He's as dumb as a box of rocks." To someone who knows nothing of lions, molasses, foxes or a box of rocks, the simile is wasted. In many cultures, as in Spanish-speaking countries, references to people as animals or other pejorative terms are considered impolite and improper. So, was it a "real DOVE" or something "like a dove"? Remember, Luke was not there. He wrote down the "opinion" of those who were there. Are the "pictures" all wrong or did the artists ASSUME it was a "dove"? Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit "dove" descended AND the "voice" of God was heard (from "heaven") apart from both the Son and the Dove ergo, the doctrine of the "Triune God". The "Triune God" refers to "God in THREE 'persons'" LIKE in the words of the song "God in three persons, Blessed Trinity." Churches have been formed and split over this concept of the "Trinity". I ask, "Is it really worth fighting over or is it LIKE josting at windmills?" (A simile) Isn't a belief in A God, A Creator, A Father of all, more important than our arguments over whether there are three "forms" of God or a thousand? Many languages, such as Spanish, have a special "person" that is used to describe one of authority or power. I wonder how this passage is phrased in Spanish? What "form" is El Senor? I'm sure some "smart" reader can clarify it for me. What about the "others" who were baptized at the same time and place as Jesus? Did they not receive the Holy Spirit when they were baptized? Now, what do you KNOW about baptism? Is baptism a prerequisite for "receiving the Holy Spirit" or does the Holy Spirit come with baptism? Is this what you have been told or did you

learn something and need to “re-think”? And now, a simile from “Charlie Chan”, “*Mind like parachute, work best when open.*” IF we are to be “people of the Book” and we “get it wrong”, how can we be critical of others who are doing the best they can with what they know and understand? Beware of always being SURE and CERTAIN about anything except the love of God for, it is the only “sure thing”. We will have a lot more to discuss this year about parsing passages and “interpreting scripture”. I will examine MY belief more severely and critically than I will your beliefs so that I can learn what I KNOW and what I think I KNOW. A lot of the time, there will be “no perfect or correct answers” to our questions but, that will keep us looking and learning. My answer to most of the “Bible questions” that are asked of me is, “I’ll tell you what I understand to be the truth at this time...” Being the “perfect parent”, God will reveal to us what we need to know and what we are able to learn WHEN we need it. Paul’s advice to Timothy still has credence, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but, a spirit of POWER and LOVE and self-control.” I challenge myself and YOU to dig deep where the “nuggets” lie so that we can understand just how deep and how wide is God’s love for each of us. It’s going to be a GREAT year. I can’t wait to hear your comments and suggestions. These are MY OPINIONS but, I could be WRONG! Again, I ask “What do you KNOW to be FACTS?” I am kept humble, not by my lack of knowledge but, by my lack of WISDOM. The more I learn, the more I want to learn. It can be a curse and a blessing. I can only hope that wisdom becomes as “catching” as the flu.