

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, January 17, 2010

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

Integrity is a choice

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 96 or 96:1-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

“Integrity is what we do, say, think and feel when no one but God will ever know. Integrity is our knowing the moral limits and choosing to not cross them.”

Having recently strayed into the realm of politics, the discussion of integrity has, once again, become germane. I have been thinking of scripture versus the U.S. Constitution since the question of “Constitutionality” has been frequently in the news. What is “integrity”? Since our “integrity” is “integral” to our values and mores, it is, therefore, a “basic part” of who we are and whose we are. What is “integral” to your “integrity”? What is the “line drawn in the sand that you will not cross”? In their collective wisdom born of experience, our Founding Fathers gave us a schematic for a “more perfect union”, a “line in the sand that must not be crossed” if we are to live together as a nation: The Constitution of the United States. (The maps of ancient mariners were engraved with words to describe the “line that must not be crossed” by sailors. These “unknown areas” from which no one had returned to tell the tale were labeled: “*Warning, beyond here lie dragons.*”) In comparison, God has given us “laws” and a schematic for a “productive and happy life”, His revealed “word”. Many saints have given their lives to preserve the “Bible” that we hold in our hands. Many good men and women have given their lives to preserve their nation and the Constitution. What “standards” must the Christian “hew to”? Upon what “standard” will you firmly plant your feet and not be moved? It only stands to reason that an understanding of the “rules” would be basic in our determination of what is “rational, spiritual and worthy”. “Integrity” as a “concept” is easy to grasp. “Integrity” as a “moral compass” is often difficult and “expensive” to maintain. One either possesses integrity or one is bereft of it. Is the U.S. Constitution “a living document”? Is the scripture that we study “a living document” subject to alteration and editing? For over two hundred years, the U.S. Constitution has been a serviceable blueprint to our “forming a more perfect union”. Should we discard it and relegate it to the scrapheap or should we adhere closely to its precepts? What about the “Word of God”? Should it, too, be discarded,

amended or cast aside as “outdated”, “outmoded” or “useless in OUR times”? Do we waste our time studying history, the founding documents of our nation or Holy Scripture? If our decision about either specie of literature is that it is worthless, arcane or out-dated, then, upon what will our integrity depend? I believe that, in our feeble “wisdom”, both proven “lamps unto our feet” are valuable. Does it matter that the U.S. Constitution was written by Deists who held the belief of a “Creator” as “obvious” and unquestionable? Does it matter that the Holy Scriptures were written down and crudely edited by “mankind”? As discussed previously, TRUTH never changes, only our attitude toward TRUTH. Remember these words of our Declaration of Independence and see if you agree to their validity: ***“We hold these TRUTHS to be self-evident that, all men are created equal and are endowed by THEIR CREATOR with certain inalienable RIGHTS among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”*** RIGHTS can only be granted by the Creator while “privileges” flow from the largesse of government. There are reasons for having every person entering military service or public office to affirm or swear the “Oath of Allegiance” to the U.S. Constitution. The Oath is taken with the right hand upon a book of moral standards that make the “swearer” beholden to the “author” of the “scripture”. The “oath” often concludes with “so help me GOD.” A contract and an Oath are only as “good” as the persons who sign them or swear them. An “Oath of Office” is nothing more or less than a CONTRACT between the person taking the Oath and the people they “represent”. Marriage vows are only as “good” as the person who swears them. Our promise to follow Jesus or to uphold the Constitution of the United States is only “proven” by the integrity of the person who has promised or sworn. We study to “learn the rules” so we can have a basis for determining “the line we will not cross”. We study to learn the experiences written down by others who have successfully or unsuccessfully lived by oaths and promises made to a “Creator”, a spouse or some “authority”. What other “source” do we have for learning “integrity”? Jesus teaches us “integrity”, the “Holy Spirit” teaches us “integrity” and living LIFE teaches us “integrity” as we apply wise counsel to daily living. “What is the line in the sand that you will not cross?” Personal “integrity” depends largely on our relationship with the Creator, doesn’t it?

Isaiah 62:1-5

*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.*

You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the LORD delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

Isaiah had integrity in that he risked life and limb to give good news of HOPE to God's people. "Husband" means "caretaker". In the same way that God took care of Israel, God has promised that He will take care of His children. In the same way that a young man of integrity PROMISES to take care of his bride, God takes care of you and me. Not only does God take care of his "bride", he REJOICES over us. That is the reason we should desire and have integrity: because we are REDEEMED by God and we do not want to be shamed by not being obedient to his commandments. Integrity is what causes us to "love our neighbor as ourselves" and to "love our God with all our hearts, minds and beings." We have promised to "follow Jesus"? Will we have the "integrity" to follow Him?

Psalm 36:5-10 Page 632, BCP

Dixit injustus

5

***Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, *
and your faithfulness to the clouds.***

6

***Your righteousness is like the strong mountains,
your justice like the great deep; *
you save both man and beast, O LORD.***

7

***How priceless is your love, O God! *
your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.***

8

***They feast upon the abundance of your house; *
you give them drink from the river of your delights.***

9

***For with you is the well of life, *
and in your light we see light.***

10

***Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you, *
and your favor to those who are true of heart.***

3

The reader will please forgive my loose association of many words under the “category” of “integrity”. Is integrity another word for “faithfulness”, “righteousness” and “justice”? We have a “higher purpose” and a “higher standard” around which our lives must be centered. We are compelled to be “people of high integrity” as “children of the God, Most High”.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Paul, the consummate teacher, attempted to clarify the issue of “spiritual gifts” for the Corinthians. The Corinthians were “given to idols” which were “man-made” objects of worship that were “not alive and mute”. The Holy Spirit, being alive, can “speak” in contrast to “idols”. People are often given to trying to label others or to use some “gift” as a reason for their being “held in HIGH esteem” by others who do not possess the same “gift”. What does this have to do with “integrity”? The person of “integrity” cannot be egotistical because they KNOW that God is impartial and loves his children equally. Knowing this, why would one “gift” be more “valuable” than another? What a boring world this would be if God gave everyone the SAME “gifts”. Integrity means acknowledging the “gift” and using it for its intended purpose: to GLORIFY the Father. The Spirit “comes alive” through the action of the “gifts” as they are practiced among the brothers and sisters in Christ. Which “gifts” have you and I received? Even “gifts” require practice and perfecting to be effectual. Note that, the “gifts” enumerated, all teach, educate, edify, heal or communicate to the “brothers and sisters”. To me, the most precious “gift” listed in this passage is the “gift of FAITH”. Having FAITH will illuminate all the other gifts and make them truly effective. Do you think of “faith” as a “gift” from God? The other “gifts” should add to the FAITH of those who witness their usage. Trust God to give us the “gifts” we NEED to be effective servants who are “well pleasing” in the Kingdom. Integrity is using the “gift” wisely.

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

This story has always caused me to giggle inwardly. It is classic mother/son interaction. The "proud" mother wants the son to "show off" his talents to meet the needs of others. My parents were always sending me patients who they told "Oh, he's the greatest doctor in the world and he can cure anything." Jesus must have felt like I felt. Without getting distracted into whether the "wine" was alcohol or grape juice, let us explore the minutia of this passage. Jesus was obviously a "friend of the groom or bride" at this wedding. Weddings were a highlight of Jewish life when friends gathered to participate in the "rite of marriage" and to wish the newlyweds "Mazal Tov" (Hebrew for "good luck"). It was the responsibility of the hosts to provide the libations for the guests. Why was Mary, mother of Jesus, even involved in the situation? Was SHE the hostess or "good friends" with the hosts? Some have intimated that, because of her involvement, it was "Jesus' wedding". I will not "open that can of worms" and will let it pass. Jesus had integrity and did not want to expose his "power" before "his time". Integrity knows when to act and when not to act. Integrity knows what to say and when to say it. This "turning the water into wine" was the first "sign" that Jesus performed in public. Remember that John's Gospel is the place we should always turn to find "person to person" interaction stories. (John's Gospel is where we find the story of "Nicodemus", "The woman at the well", "The man born blind" and many other tales of personal interaction.) This was a case of "person to person" between Jesus and his mother. Jesus did what his mother asked, changed the water into wine and it "revealed his glory" and caused others to believe in him. Did Jesus show his "integrity" by doing what his mother asked, sparing the hosts embarrassment or by using his power to create FAITH in the disciples? Integrity is doing the right thing for the right reason especially when no one else can do it but us. Integrity does not seek "reward". Integrity might be

substituted for the word “love” as demarcated in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians which immediately follows the passage from Corinthians cited above. “Spiritual Gifts” have their place in the panoply of God but they are “second-rate” to LOVE. Without LOVE, “gifts” become merely “parlor tricks”. Integrity might be defined as “the love of God in action”? The edges of any definition of “integrity” get blurred when seen through the eyes of TRUTH. Integrity is true freedom in that the “boundaries” of who we are and whose we are lie like a line in the sand beyond which we must not stray. So, integrity is both a gift and a choice that each must make. It is the bulwark that separates us from the world and keeps our focus on things “eternal”. Do we have “integrity”? Integrity is the spark that lights the “lamp unto our feet” so that we can “see the path” that lies before us. As Solomon prayed for “discernment” so that he might judge the people rightly, let us pray for integrity so that we might judge ourselves rightly. Lord, hear my prayer.