

## **eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, January 3, 2010**

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

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Psalm 84 or 84:1-8

**“Life is like a roll of toilet tissue. The closer to the end we get, the faster it seems to go.”**

It's official: I have now been writing these discussions for three complete cycles of the Revised Common Lectionary for a total of NINE years. What wondrous passages we have explored together. I hope the reader finds them useful each week. These discussions are to supplement personal Bible study and not to be the ONLY study one does. Okay, if this is the only time during the week that the reader thinks about scripture, I guess I should be pleased that, at least, we are studying at all. A hidden benefit is that, if your church follows the Lectionary, you will excite the preacher that you are studying the same scriptures that they are studying. Misery really does love company. You can also tell when the preacher is “cheating” and skipping the hard scriptures. The start of the calendar year is the appropriate time for making a schedule for the coming year. Not planning is a plan sure to fail. Take down the calendar and mark all important dates and events that you can remember. This will come in handy as the year unfolds. Be sure to write down your own birthday if for no other reason than to inform your friends and family. You might even have your friends and family take the calendar and enter their own important dates directly on your calendar. This will prevent our forgetting such important things as tax filing dates, anniversaries, annual doctor and dentist appointments, insurance renewal dates, etc. AND, it is a perfect time and place to WRITE down our “New Year’s Resolutions” with reminders each month to keep us on track. Also, the preacher can remember to order Advent Calendars for the next Advent. Write down all federal, state and local holidays. Write down when school is out and when school begins in the fall. Look back at last year’s calendar and remember what happened and what did not. It’s okay to look backward...just don’t stare. Welcome to new friends and readers and thank you to those who have been reading and writing their questions each week. Your comments keep me thinking and your questions help keep me on track. I also want to thank the many “men and women of the cloth”, the “God Squad”, who write me and occasionally attend the Sunday-morning class. Your input and comments encourage and edify me. **Happy New Year 2010!** It will be over before we know it so, get to enjoying it. As Mrs.

Hudson said in *Sherlocke Holmes*, "***What we cannot cure, we must endure.***"

### **Jeremiah 31:7-14**

***Thus says the LORD:***

***Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,  
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;  
proclaim, give praise, and say,  
"Save, O LORD, your people,  
the remnant of Israel."***

***See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,  
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,  
among them the blind and the lame, those with child and  
those in labor, together;  
a great company, they shall return here.***

***With weeping they shall come,  
and with consolations I will lead them back,  
I will let them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;  
for I have become a father to Israel,  
and Ephraim is my firstborn.***

***Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,  
and declare it in the coastlands far away;  
say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him,  
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."***

***For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,  
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.  
They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,  
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,  
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,  
and over the young of the flock and the herd;  
their life shall become like a watered garden,  
and they shall never languish again.***

***Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,  
and the young men and the old shall be merry.***

***I will turn their mourning into joy,  
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.***

***I will give the priests their fill of fatness,  
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,  
says the LORD.***

The Christmas holidays are often associated with a "home-coming" when all the "black sheep" are forced to associate with the "rest of the sheep" (I was the "Hounds-tooth" sheep in my family?). Nostalgia for this Christmas "home-coming" event has led to many "made-for-TV" dramas. The people of Israel had been spread all over the globe because of having been taken prisoner by various

marauding nations or as a result of internal conflicts inside the Nation of Israel. Jeremiah was a priest who rubbed elbows with kings and politicians. This association led to his being taken as a “captive” into Egypt. His words were dictated to his secretary, Baruch, who added the words at the end of the Book of Jeremiah after the death of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was predicting the “great future reunion” that would happen when God would restore the Israelites to their “Promised Land”. (We often fail to appreciate the “Promised Land” until we lose it.) By constantly focusing on what “was”, we neglect to realize that these ARE “the good old days”. Jeremiah created a word picture of how he visualized the reunion would be. Did we get to enjoy the “reunion” we pictured during the Christmas Holidays? Did the Christmas Season meet your “expectations”? By now, many of the gifts and toys are already broken, discarded or returned. The “gift” seldom meets expectations. The “box” has all sorts of advertisements printed on the outside to raise our expectations and to enhance our “enjoyment” of the gift. AND we are such poor consumers that we BELIEVE their drive year after year and gift after gift. (That “batteries NOT included” has ruined many a Christmas morning.) Giving money solves most of these hard decisions as “one size fits all” and they always need it? Now we get to “visualize” the coming year. Will 2010 be as eventful as 2009? What new things can we visualize? What new skills will we acquire? What new people will we encounter? What insights will be elucidated in ourselves? How will we “make our world ‘better’” this year? What habits will we break or institute? Regrettably, some of us will not see the end of 2010. For some of us, next Christmas will be as unattainable as the “Promised Land” was to Moses. Even Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet”, had an optimistic view of the future of the Jews. What is your view of the future? Is it pessimistic or optimistic? The “gift of Jesus” that we just celebrated ought to instill us with hopeful optimism and JOY for the possibilities of the coming year. Make a plan for 2010, write it down but, be ready to alter the plan as the year unfolds. Swing for the fences but, accept a single base hit with grace. Happy NEW year! The “NEW” is the important word in that greeting. We get to start over, again. What is your vision for 2010? Now, plan your work and work your plan believing that God will be there to erase our mistakes and reward our successes with even greater opportunity.

### **Psalm 84 or 84:1-8 Page 707, BCP**

***Quam dilecta!* = “How dear” (*Quam* = how + *dilecta* = delicious, satisfying, fulfilling)**

1

**How dear to me is your dwelling, O LORD of hosts! \***  
***My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the LORD;***  
***my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.***

2

***The sparrow has found her a house***  
***and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; \****  
***by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts,***  
***my King and my God.***

3

***Happy are they who dwell in your house! \****  
***they will always be praising you.***

4

***Happy are the people whose strength is in you! \****  
***whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.***

5

***Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of***  
***springs, \****  
***for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.***

6

***They will climb from height to height, \****  
***and the God of gods will reveal himself in Zion.***

7

***LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; \****  
***hearken, O God of Jacob.***

8

***Behold our defender, O God; \****  
***and look upon the face of your Anointed.***

9

***For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own***  
***room, \****  
***and to stand at the threshold of the house of my God***  
***than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.***

10

***For the LORD God is both sun and shield; \****  
***he will give grace and glory;***

11

***No good thing will the LORD withhold \****  
***from those who walk with integrity.***

12

***O LORD of hosts, \****  
***HAPPY are they who put their trust in you!***

The Lectionary collators have given us another psalm of HOPE to start our new

year. Last year is gone, put to bed, in the garbage disposal, in our memory banks (unless your “RAM” is as volatile as mine). It is pure folly to “make past history into current events”. Were we happier last year than we visualize our being in the coming year? The “state” of being “happy” is a gift of God. Things cannot make us “happy”. We “survived” last year, didn’t we? It is, once again, a matter of our ATTITUDE. What is our attitude toward the coming year? Do we dread it? Is it the uncertainty of the future that causes our dread? The psalmist records his vision of being “happy”: ***“For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own room,”*** What is your vision for being “happy”? Can you “see it”? That would be a good “goal” for the coming year...to be HAPPY. Paul found contentment in this change of attitude because he learned that, IF he stayed in the presence of God, his happiness was secured, even while imprisoned. We may be “imprisoned” in terrible “life situations” but we can change our attitude to one of gratitude and happiness. HAPPY New Year? It is our choice. Can we say, like the psalmist, “Quam dilecta”?

### **Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a**

***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.***

“Churches” have formed and split over “pre-destination”. Is their opinion based on this scripture? What does that “destined” mean to you? Does it mean that God had a plan for our lives even before we were created? Does God have a “New Year’s Resolution” that we are “destined” to be what HE wants us to be? In Greek society, it was not uncommon for the “elites”, who were without heirs, to “adopt” individuals, even adults. The Ephesians understood this relationship better than we. Is adoption a CHOICE by the parent AND the child? Are we “fit for adoption”? Adoptions occur when a “parent” accepts the “child” AS IS and takes on the responsibilities of parenthood. Just as in modern “adoption”, the “child” is given the NAME of the “adopter” with all the privileges that flow from being “adopted”. Paul purposely refers to God as ***“the Father of glory”*** as the one who “adopts” us. Paul prays that we, the “adopted ones”, inherit a spirit of wisdom and revelation that will lead to a personal relationship with the “Father”. We are “joint heirs” with God’s Son. We are children of the Father, beloved

children of the King of Heaven. We ought to remember this when we “plan” our coming year. How will our “plan” glorify the Father who has so graciously “adopted” us? Will we make our “Father” proud? Life is short and eternity is long so, we cannot waste a single day.

### **Matthew 2:13-15,19-23**

***Now after the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."***

***When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."***

Why is this passage cited at the beginning of the New Year? Does it imply that God had a plan to save the child, Jesus, even before he was “born”? The Heavenly Father used the “earthly father” of Jesus to preserve the Lord from King Herod? (Remember, Matthew’s Gospel was written to “prove” the divinity of Jesus to the Jews so, Matthew stresses the fulfillment of prophecy about Jesus as Messiah.) As prophesized, Joseph, Mary and the child went down into Egypt to escape those who would murder the child. After the death of Herod, Joseph had another “dream” announcing that it was “safe” for Jesus to return to Nazareth to “fulfill” another aspect of the prophecy so that he could be called a “Nazorean”. Even the prophets knew of God’s plan? Did Joseph take Jesus into Egypt and then to Nazareth only to fulfill what he knew the prophets had foretold? What has been prophesized about your life and my life? Where is the “plan” written for our lives? Do you have a guess? How about, “Honor (respect) your father and your mother for, this is the first commandment with promise” OR “Fear (respect) God and keep his commandments, this is the whole duty of mankind.” I can see the “tie” that binds the two commandments as one, can you? If God “used” the earthly parents of Jesus to preserve His life and we are “joint heirs with Jesus”, does God “use” US to fulfill his “plan”? WE are created with a PURPOSE and a PLAN by the God, Most High. This is my opinion on “pre-destination”. As always, we are free to choose to follow our plan or God’s plan. Which will we choose? As we plan our coming NEW YEAR, should we assimilate God’s plan into our own or, should we assimilate our plan into God’s plan? As I have said ad nauseum, “The only thing in life that we can control or

change is our ATTITUDE.” Choose life. Choose HOPE. Choose JOY. Choose to be HAPPY and spread it around to fulfill our “purpose for being”. **“...being always READY to give a REASON for the HOPE that lies within you.”** Not everything that happens in our coming year will be “pleasant”, “nice” or “productive”. BUT, we have the power to change the sad, the ugly, the unpleasant, the failures, the heartaches and whatever may befall us into something GOOD if we can control our ATTITUDE. I fight a constant battle to control my attitude, how about you? God WANTS us to be HAPPY. May God give us the grace to align our attitudes with His will in the coming year. Then, it will truly be:

**Happy New Year, 2010!**