

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, July 18, 2010

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

“He jumped on his horse and rode off in all directions.”

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.

This week’s Lectionary readings:

Amos 8:1-12

Psalm 52

Colossians 1:15-28

Luke 10:38-42

See if you can find the “link” that ties these passages. I haven’t a clue. Good hunting. Perhaps it’s because my mind is racing and my brain is tired? Oh, well. Maybe the “title” will get some to read the discussion.

Amos 8:1-12

This is what the Lord GOD showed me-- a basket of summer fruit. He said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me,

***"The end has come upon my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by.***

***The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,"
says the Lord GOD;***

***"the dead bodies shall be many,
cast out in every place. Be silent!"***

***Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;***

***and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?***

***We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,***

***buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat."***

***The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.
Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who lives in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,***

***and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?
On that day, says the Lord GOD,
I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on all loins,
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son,
and the end of it like a bitter day.
The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD,
when I will send a famine on the land;
not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.
They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD,
but they shall not find it***

The image that Amos saw was a “basket of fruit” but, the “message” was about destruction and famine? The “curse” that was prophesied for the Israelites was a “famine of hearing the words of the Lord.” One of my problems is that I often don’t “see things clearly”. I often see things “through rose-colored glasses” or through a “blue funk”. I vacillate between “optimism” and “pessimism” depending on my situation and experiences of the day. The Israelites THOUGHT that they had a “basket of fruit” (a “cornucopia” or “horn of plenty”) which was endless but, Amos told them that “the party was over”. That is not an easy message to get through to people in the midst of prosperity and rising stock prices, is it? Prior to 2008, who in American KNEW that the “Wall Street Crash” and worldwide “recessions” were about to occur? There were a few who knew history and predicted a “market correction” because of the lack of discipline in our business principles and ethics. Some even said, “Greed is good”? No one WANTED to believe that the wheels were about to come off the economic wagon, did they? We easily forget the history we do not experience PERSONALLY. My parents, who lived THROUGH the “Great Depression”, KNEW that it was possible and always planned for its return. They knew better than to trust their government for anything but more government devoid of real answers to problems. People of MY generation had no memory of the dire circumstances of the Great Depression so, we thought it was a fairy tale and believed the prosperity would always exist. Wrong, Grasshopper, the Piper always has to be paid. Greed and bad judgment linked with “unseen events” always lead to crashes. People “bend” their principles and values when “everyone is doing it” in a vainglorious attempt to ignore history and God’s sovereignty over ALL the world and all its inhabitants and governments. They made themselves the measure of what was

“right and wrong” based on THEIR greed, their lying and cheating and their lusts. Did God punish the Israelites or did the Israelites bring it on themselves? Did God cause our markets to crash or did WE bring it on ourselves? What about the concept of “natural consequences”? This philosophical argument divides economists into “Keynesian” and “Austrian” SCHOOLS of thought about markets and how they should operate. Which are we? How about personal honesty and honor for those who live honestly and not for greed? Can an honest person still be elected to a government position? Term limits are a good start at keeping our government “honest” but, Congress gets to make the rules so, don’t hold your breath. Today is history tomorrow. What will be “our story”? Will we “repeat history” or will we learn from it?

Psalm 52, Page 657 BCP

Quid gloriaris? = “Why do you boast?”

1

***You tyrant, why do you boast of wickedness *
against the godly all day long?***

2

***You plot ruin;
your tongue is like a sharpened razor, *
O worker of deception.***

3

***You love evil more than good *
and lying more than speaking the truth.***

4

***You love all words that hurt, *
O you deceitful tongue.***

5

***Oh, that God would demolish you utterly, *
topple you, and snatch you from your dwelling,
and root you out of the land of the living!***

6

***The righteous shall see and tremble, *
and they shall laugh at him, saying,***

7

***"This is the one who did not take God for a refuge, *
but trusted in great wealth
and relied upon wickedness."***

8

***But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; *
I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.***

9

I will give you thanks for what you have done *

3

and declare the goodness of your Name in the presence of the godly.

The theme of earthly consequences for lack of personal and communal obedience to Godly principles is another thread in the Bible tapestry. I could just "ditto" the above comments and move on...so, I will.

Colossians 1:15-28

Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him-- provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone MATURE IN CHRIST.

This is Paul's "opinion" of the nature of Christ's "position" in ALL events, ALL creations and ALL "time". This passage is reflexive of the opening verses of the Gospel of John in that it contains a "hierarchy" of the "place" of Christ in the Heavenly Realm. Time is a human concept so that we can "order" our world. WE add terms to divide historical time into handy cubby-holes, such as "B.C.E." (Before the Common Era) and "A.D." (the "year of Our Lord) forgetting that the Julian calendar is WRONG by several years. If the year of the birth of Christ is debatable, the entire calendar is "off". The calendar is a convenient method of recording the events and lengths of our "lives". Is Jesus Christ "God"? Pretend that you have never heard of Jesus and you are reading Colossians for the first

time. Is this passage “clear” to you? Paul seems to equate Christ WITH “God” with the same ability to create, reveal and “hold all things together” AS “God”. Do we hold this same “belief”? While Christ was “among us”, was he “God” or just an avatar of “God” who “took on flesh”? Does Paul have it correct or was he merely giving his “opinion”? Does it matter? Paul proudly states that the gospel “has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.” Can that possibly be true? If Paul was incorrect in his assessment of the scope of the task of preaching to “the entire world”, about what else is he mistaken? Is Paul’s “opinion” any more important than the “opinion” of anyone else? Is the “opinion” of any “human” more valid or more valuable than any other “human’s”? Be careful, that question will make you a “rat in a maze”. On what did Paul base his “opinion” about the “position” of Christ in the “hierarchy” of Heaven? Trust God, all others must be validated. Paul tried to explain Heavenly concepts in human terms. Was he successful? WE must be very careful to PREACH CHRIST and not PAUL. Paul was NOT God. Paul had good advice for “his time” and “his world”. Is the advice still “valid” today? Be very careful to not “quote Paul to validate Paul”. If this passage is “incorrect” either by content or translation, can we trust ANY of Paul’s letters to be “accurate”? IF we doubt Paul’s writings for being valid, we can shorten our New Testament by two-thirds and focus on the other “books”. Can we validate the “Four Gospels”? Some say we cannot. If we “eliminate” the Gospels AND the letters of Paul, we are left with very little “Bible” to study and follow. What we are left with is very simple and very “mystical”: “Fear God and keep His commandments and treat others like you would like to be treated.” Will “fewer rules” make it easier for us to “obey”? Paul was trying to “unite” the Colossians around Christ or, HIS opinion of Christ. Most “religious” rules are man-made and divisive. Is that what God desires? “A word to the WISE is sufficient.” What about us who are not wise? Perhaps we should pray for “wisdom” and “discernment” so that we can become “mature in Christ”? (I think that Paul was writing PERSONAL letters to his friends and “children in the Lord” and never intended them to be used as “theological dogma”. Would YOUR or MY letters make “good theology”? In modern terms, we are “hacking Paul’s e-mail and using it for doctrine? I tend to give Paul a lot of grace because his “cause was just” and his “intentions were pure”. Oh, that we could give such grace to each other.)

Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

We recently discussed this story in these pages but, from another “gospel”. Is this story about “sibling rivalry”, “jealousy” or something else? I think it is about “holding on to what is really important in life”. We are all going to be “dead” a lot longer than we are going to be “alive”. The saddest words in our language are “IF ONLY”. Grandfather clocks are often engraved with the sad reminder, “Tempis Fugit”, “time flies”. Mary had her attention focused on the PRESENT Jesus, a guest in her home. Martha was “playing house”, an act akin to “re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic”. We are often distracted from the “important things” by “unimportant things”. “Wisdom” and “discernment” are useful in determining which are the “important” and the “unimportant” things in life. Martha extended “hospitality” to Jesus and “invited him into her home”. Then, Martha chose “busy work” while Mary chose “being in the presence of the Lord” (acknowledged him) and was commended for her choice. What is the lesson we should “take” from this story? Is it that extending “hospitality” is more than “feeding the guests”? Is it that being WITH the guests is more important than worrying about the food being perfect or the house “clean enough to eat off the floor”? Do we invite people into our “church home” and then ignore them? What makes people “feel at home”? Hospitality is being open to people without judging them? Do we “impose” rules upon “new people” before we get to KNOW them? Perhaps we should re-think how we treat “new people” in our churches? Churches and their lack of “hospitality” is the prime reason why people “visit” but never return. Would you feel “comfortable” inviting ANYONE into “your church”? If not, why not? IF we treat every “guest” like Martha treated Jesus, would they feel “appreciated”? Did Mary get it “right”? A church that “does hospitality” RIGHT is a church that is ALIVE and GROWING. The key is the ATTITUDE of the “people in the pews” more than the “preacher’s sermons”. “Church” is not entertainment. If one wants to be “entertained” by a “great sermon”, they are missing the point. See a great movie instead. Sermons are nothing more than one person telling their story so that others can identify with the story-teller and be convicted, encouraged and know the love of God. Giving people grace costs us nothing. Again, what are the “important” things that give us purpose and allow us to be obedient servants? Here they are: ***“Love God with all you heart, mind and being and TREAT OTHERS like you would like to be treated.”*** Our ATTITUDE must reflect these principles because, if we adhere to these basic tenets, there is no room for greed, judgmental behavior or division along “rules”. Churches are hospitals for sinners and not country clubs for “perfect people”. If they were, most of us would worship ALONE. I believe that the only thing over which we have ANY control is our ATTITUDE whether personal or as a “church”.