

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, July 4, 2010

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

### **Happy Independence Day, America**

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This week's Lectionary readings:

2 Kings 5:1-14

Psalm 30

Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Are we "free"? How do we know whether we are "free" or not? A fish in an aquarium is "free". A gerbil in a cage is "free" only because he knows nothing "better". Those who have lived in other countries understand "freedom" better than those who have always known "freedom". Freedom taken for granted is often taken away. Oh, it is not taken away all at once. Rather, it is taken away bit by bit, piece by piece, act by act. So it is with "freedom in Christ". We are like "sows that are washed returning to the wallowing in the mire" or "dogs to their own vomit." We don't value freedom in Christ so we "backslide" back into our old ways of slavery to "self" and "self-reliance". Why do we do this to ourselves? Repentance is the realization that we cannot control our lives and make a choice to turn BACK to something "greater than ourselves". When we "hit bottom" the only way to look is UP. Confession is the verbal statement of our realization of our loss and need for "freedom" beyond ourselves. We seem to want just enough "Jesus" to buy "fire insurance" without making a full commitment to "Christianity". And we wonder why we soon fall away? Christianity is all or none, like pregnancy. When we come to the "place" where we cannot live by our own devices, we begin to look for "something out there" that will relieve our pain or our loss. Have we ever doubted the existence of God? Have we ever been "mad at" God? Every sentient being has doubted the existence of the Creator IF they are honest with themselves. It is part of being an honest human. Life is lived in DOUBT. Can one believe in a Creator and still have "doubts"? The questioning mind will always have doubts. God made me this way for purpose. Perhaps, the "purpose" is so that I would seek a Creator. The scientist mind in me is always looking for evidence for a Creator. God's existence is totally dependent on MY faith based on MY experience. Many have "looked for God". Some have "found God" in all the wrong places. The wrong "place" does not grant freedom. The wrong "place" only evokes slavery to something OTHER than God. If you ask a hundred people about "God", you will get one hundred and one answers. Why is this? It is because our understanding of God's existence depends on our PERSONAL experience with the Creator. IF we "find" what we are looking for, God is present. If we "look for God" and don't get an

immediate answer, we assume that God does not exist. If we are “looking for God” God’s presence will be seen. If we are NOT “looking for God” something will take God’s place. Be careful what you ask for, you just might find it. The passages for this week are examples of how others “found God” and what they “found” when God was present. Be careful what questions you ask. You might not like the answers. But, it is our nature to keep looking for something “better”. In this way, we are no wiser than the fish or the gerbil. The parables of the “treasure buried in a field” and the “pearl of great price” speak to this issue of finding something “better”. Again I ask, “Are we FREE?” Not unless we act “free”. Freedom is nothing more or less than an ATTITUDE of appreciation.

## **2 Kings 5:1-14**

***Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."***

***He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."***

***But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven***

***times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.***

It seems like only yesterday that I was discussing this story with the readers. "Leprosy" was used to describe MANY skin lesions in the ancient world. It obviously made Naaman "stand out" and caused him to be ostracized. He was only accepted because of his talent as a warrior which made him "valuable" to the King of Aram. "Aram" is the origin of the "Aramaic Greek" dialect? There are currently very few people conversant in Aramaic. Supposedly, all the known "speakers" appeared in "The Last Temptation of Christ". Naaman sought healing. A captive girl gave him directions to be healed. The King of Israel took the letter from the King of Aram as a threat because he did not recognize the request for God's healing of Naaman. Elisha accepted the assignment with alacrity because he believed in the healing power of God that was available to Naaman. Elisha's "prescription" for Naaman seemed foolish at first glance. It seemed foolish because it demanded FAITH in God rather than obedience to some "magical cure". Only at the begging of a servant did Naaman comply and receive healing. Was the river full of steroid cream? Was the river "magic"? No, the "magic" was the faith of the servant girl, the faithful servant of Naaman and the FAITH of Naaman that God would "heal him". Naaman was made "free" of his uncleanness through faith in the same way that you and I are "cleansed of all unrighteousness" through the blood of Christ? Faith "heals". Water washes. God provides both. Do you think that Naaman was grateful to God or to Elisha for his healing? Elisha never even spoke to Naaman. Elisha believed God could heal AND, eventually, Naaman believed. Do you think that the "healing" convinced Naaman of the existence of "God"? What "healing" is required for us to believe in the "existence of God"? What "evidence" can we cite for the existence of "God"?

### **Psalm 30 Page 621, BCP**

*Exaltabo te, Domine= "I will exalt you, O Lord."*

1

***I will exalt you, O LORD,  
because you have lifted me up \*  
and have not let my enemies triumph over me.***

2

***O LORD my God, I cried out to you, \*  
and you restored me to health.***

3

***You brought me up, O LORD, from the dead; \*  
you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.***

4

***Sing to the LORD, you servants of his; \*  
give thanks for the remembrance of his holiness.***

3

5

***For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye, \*  
his favor for a lifetime.***

6

***Weeping may spend the night, \*  
but joy comes in the morning.***

7

***While I felt secure, I said,  
"I shall never be disturbed. \*  
You, LORD, with your favor, made me as strong as the mountains."***

8

***Then you hid your face, \*  
and I was filled with fear.***

9

***I cried to you, O LORD; \*  
I pleaded with the Lord, saying,***

10

***"What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit? \*  
will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?"***

11

***Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me; \*  
O LORD, be my helper."***

12

***You have turned my wailing into dancing; \*  
you have put off my sack-cloth and clothed me with joy.***

13

***Therefore my heart sings to you without ceasing; \*  
O LORD my God, I will give you thanks for ever.***

Verse 6 is the basis of the title of "Joy in the Morning", a Richard Chamberlain film from my past. Note that verses 12 and 13 link DANCING and SINGING, contrary to what some might espouse. Gratitude produces JOY because of the PRESENCE of a Creator in our lives. Can there be JOY without recognition of the source of the JOY? JOY is the "marker" for those who have experienced the presence of God in life. At least, that is the source of true JOY in MY life. Has that been your experience? Think of times in your life when you were truly JOYOUS and see if you can find "God's presence" manifested in the events. Was it the "new baby", the "marriage", the "healing" that GAVE you JOY? Can we "see God" in sad times as easily as in times of "joy"? Attitude is the key. Our attitude about the presence of the Creator will determine our outcome...joy or doubt. I admit that it is "harder" to identify the presence of the Creator in times of pain and loss than in times of joy and elation but, trust me, the Creator is there. All of us prefer JOY to pain and suffering but, God is present in both. Who else can give us solace? Who else can change our attitude to Joy?

## **Galatians 6:(1-6)7-16**

***[My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads.***

***Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.]***

***Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.***

***See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised-- only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule-- peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.***

Paul is addressing one of the hardest "issues" in Christendom...those who "sin" among us. It becomes less of an issue when we can see the "sin" in our own lives and realize that we, too, are in need of forgiveness and restoration. Our ATTITUDE is foremost in our ability to forgive and restore EACH OTHER. Members of the "body" are responsible to God and to each other because we are "one in the Spirit". Sin has its "own reward"...*"for you reap whatever you sow."* Truer words were never spoken or written. Church "amputations" are a last option for true "churches". We attempt to "heal" first with gentleness and save the "drastic" action for when all else fails. Even "amputations" are for eventual "healing and restoration" of the individual. An ATTITUDE of mutual respect and LOVE will allow us to see ourselves more clearly and to "treat others as we would like to be treated." Some think that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was poor eyesight hence; his words "See what LARGE letters I make when I am writing in my own hand." No, he is not writing in the "palm of his hand". It means that he was writing the letters WITH his own hand versus the Scribe's writing the words. These words were obviously IMPORTANT to Paul that they be exactly what he meant to write. They are words of love and humility meant to inspire

others to humility and grace with each other. Who has never needed forgiveness and healing? A “new creation” is the goal of our healing. Paul knew it. Do we?

### **Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**

***After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.***

***Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'***

***"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."***

***The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."***

This “sending of the seventy” is the basis of a lot of “Missionary churches”. You may have encountered some of these “missionaries” at your doorsteps. How do you react: A slammed door, a look of disgust or a kind hearing? Having walked neighborhoods in my campaign, I can attest that people are reticent to open the doors to their homes to strangers even someone as charming as I. Jesus sent these folks out on a “trial run” while He was still with them so that he could counsel them about rejection? The rules were clear: if they reject you, reject them but, if they accept you, bless them. That’s the way God is: He blesses those who recognize him and accept Him. Door-to-door salesmen know that each “rejection” only gets them closer to a “yes”. Persistence is paramount when going door to door or village to village. Is the message “be persistent” or is the message “slam the door in THEIR faces”? Is that consistent with the God that you know? IF our message is “hopeful” and “healing” and full of FREEDOM, it will be accepted more than not. The message is not the problem. Our ATTITUDE is the problem. People are “looking for God”. We need only make sure that our message is GOD’S MESSAGE, full of freedom and healing and not

OUR MESSAGE full of slavery and guilt. Are we free? If we are FREE, why don't we act like it and show it? "If you're happy and you know it then, your face will surely show it." JOY attracts. Guilt rejects. Joy, like inalienable rights, is from God. You can "catch" more lives with JOY than with guilt. God is the God of the "second chance" and that makes me full of JOY. Free at last, praise God, we're free at last. I wish a JOYOUS Fourth of July to all who appreciate their freedom.