

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, June 20, 2010

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

Fatherhood, not for the faint of heart

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This week's Lectionary readings:

1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a

Psalm 42 and 43

Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 8:26-39

“He’s back.” I had a great vacation and came home refreshed and sunburned, ready to get “back in the groove.” To all fathers: “Happy Father’s Day”. A father can be the greatest blessing in a child’s life or the greatest curse. There are no “perfect” fathers because they are human. Only a “Heavenly Father” is perfect. I had a great father and it took my “being a father” to fully appreciate his value. To those who had “less than perfect fathers”, my heart goes out to you. To those who ARE fathers, make sure you do your very best to be the best father you can be to your children. The “problem” with being the father of children is that most of us have to learn as we father. (O.J.T., that’s why it’s called “the PRACTICE of medicine. One learns all the science in medical school but must learn the art with PRACTICE.) Being a father is unlimited opportunity for guilt. Do the best you can and let God, through grace, turn our failures into victory. Teach your children to love and respect God by loving and respecting God. Remember that God sees all and little eyes are watching and learning. Children mimic what we do more closely than what we say. Bad behavior unaddressed, by child OR parent, will be seen again. Monkey see, monkey do. Small dogs and children are not easily fooled. Often, we only fool ourselves when we pretend to be something we are not. Fatherhood is not for the faint of heart. If you want to learn to pray in earnest, have children and you will be forced to learn to pray fervently. Fatherhood does not end when the child becomes eighteen. Fatherhood lasts from the moment the child draws breath until we breathe our last. Every child is a gift. Some are rejected and some are cherished. Children need YOU in their lives rather than “things”. Life is full of choices. To those who have chosen to be a “father”, good luck. You and God will become “best friends” if you do your job and accept the challenges of rearing children. Some will be “father figures” to children who are not genetically related to them. You have my greatest respect if you do your job well. There is a special place in the Kingdom which God will grant to those who do well as “step-fathers” and “father figures”. Remember that EACH child is a separate event in the universe and EACH child needs a “father” unique to their needs. Try as you might, you WILL treat your children differently because you are constantly changing and learning as are

they. Enjoy your young children while they are young because they grow up all too soon and become teen-agers when bonds get tested. "The problem with humans is that they don't eat their young." To biological fathers, father "figures" and fathers-to-be, Happy Father's Day.

1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." [Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."] He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus."

This passage follows the event of the slaughter of the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel in Chapter 18. (I suggest reading Chapter 18 and looking for the humor.) This killing of the priests “split the sheets” irreparably between Elijah and Ahab. Ahab ran home to tell his wife, Jezebel, all that had happened. Jezebel then threatened the life of Elijah and he fled into the wilderness (Negev Desert?). Most of us have experienced similar feelings of wanting to “run away and hide” from our responsibilities and enemies. I call my desire for solitude my “desert isle” phase. (Some might try to bury their woes in “DESSERT” but, that is another story.) The “word of the Lord” CAME to Elijah and asked, “**What are you doing here, Elijah?**” There are many times when I have asked myself this question, “What happened? How did I get here?” What if Elijah had stayed in Judah, trusted God for deliverance and faced Jezebel? Do I have the same lack of trust in the deliverance of God from my “troubles”? “You can run but, you can’t hide” is still true. We always take our troubles with us when we flee. Psychologists call this attempt to flee from trouble the “geographical cure”. It never works, trust me. Even on vacation, we spend the last days of our “vacation” thinking about all we face when we return from the wilderness. As to the “feeding” incident: As a child, I lived in Morocco, North Africa. I remember that, in a land where food is scarce, when bounty does occur, people eat until they are full, take a nap, awaken and eat AGAIN until they are completely full. This story is an example of such behavior. The story of the “Lord is about to pass by” is enigmatic to me. Much has been made of the Lord’s not being in the wind, the earthquake or the fire. So where was the Lord? Perhaps, the LORD was IN Elijah? Was it God talking or was it the presence of the Lord IN Elijah? Is that “voice for good” in our heads the “voice of the presence of God in our life”? The voice said, “GO, return to your home and face the music.” The “Lord” told Elijah to go home and appoint NEW leaders in Israel who would purge the land of all people who had worshipped Baal. Eventually, Jezebel would receive the harsh punishment she vowed upon Elijah. Wilderness experiences (camp, vacation, etc.) can restore us, encourage us, educate us OR destroy our “will to accomplish”. Jesus was encouraged in the wilderness. Elijah was restored and given a new vision in his wilderness experience. Both had positive experiences in the wilderness as they acknowledged the presence and strength of God who WENT WITH THEM into the wilderness? Yes, if we are people of God, we TAKE GOD with us because God is our Father who will never desert or neglect us. Eventually, everyone has to leave the “wilderness” and face the music of life. A useful “mountain top experience” gives us the strength to get down in the “valley” where life “happens”. Be encouraged like Elijah; God is always with us on the mountain and in the valley. “Yea, though I walk through the VALLEY of death, thou art WITH ME,” David knew it, do we?

Psalm 42 Page 643, BCP

Quemadmodum

1

**As the deer longs for the water-brooks, *
so longs my soul for you, O God.**

2

***My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God; *
when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?***

3

***My tears have been my food day and night, *
while all day long they say to me,
"Where now is your God?"***

4

***I pour out my soul when I think on these things: *
how I went with the multitude and led them into the house of God,***

5

***With the voice of praise and thanksgiving, *
among those who keep holy-day.***

6

***Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?***

7

**Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him,
who is the help of my countenance, and my God.**

8

***My soul is heavy within me; *
therefore I will remember you from the land of Jordan,
and from the peak of Mizar among the heights of Hermon.***

9

***One deep calls to another in the noise of your cataracts; *
all your rapids and floods have gone over me.***

10

***The LORD grants his loving-kindness in the daytime; *
in the night season his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.***

11

***I will say to the God of my strength,
"Why have you forgotten me? *
and why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses me?"***

12

***While my bones are being broken, *
my enemies mock me to my face;***

13

*All day long they mock me *
and say to me, "Where now is your God?"*

14

*Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?*

15

*Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him,
who is the help of my countenance, and my God.*

The psalmist is speaking from the depths of despair. Have we ever “thirsted” for God like a deer pants for cool water? Do our children pant after our time and attention as the deer seeks water? What answer did the psalmist find after his “soul searching”? His summation is **“Put your trust in God; for I will yet GIVE THANKS to him, who is the help of my countenance and my God.”** When we are in the depths of despair, is this the result of OUR soul searching? “A word to the WISE is sufficient.”

Psalm 43 Page 644, BCP

*Judica me, Deus**

1

*Give judgment for me, O God, *
and defend my cause against an ungodly people; *
deliver me from the deceitful and the wicked.*

2

*For you are the God of my strength;
why have you put me from you? *
and why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses me?*

3

*Send out your light and your truth, that they may lead me, *
and bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling;*

4

*That I may go to the altar of God,
to the God of my joy and gladness; *
and on the harp I will give thanks to you, O God my God.*

5

*Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? *
and why are you so disquieted within me?*

6

*Put your trust in God; *
for I will yet give thanks to him,
who is the help of my countenance, and my God.*

Ditto above discussion as these two psalms are reflexive of one another. Both are cries for help from the depths of despair.

Galatians 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

This passage again invokes the use of Paul's "logic". The "idea" of "freedom in Christ" is a common "thread" in all of Paul's letters. If we were "abstracting" this passage, the "key words" would be "Law", "disciplinarian", "justified", "baptism", "heirs" and "faith". The "now" which begins this passage is a linking word of summation. It is an explanation to the church at Galatia about the purpose of the "Law" and the "place" of the "Law" in the establishment of Christianity. The "therefore" refers back to the preceding sentence which points out the imprisonment we experienced under the Torah. The "Law's" purpose was to "discipline" us until the Christ came to deliver FAITH to us. Faith in Christ supplanted the "Law" and freed us from the bondage of condemnation under the "Law". FAITH in Christ frees us to "put on Christ" and unite us in Christ as all divisive "labels" are removed. Our FAITH allows us to claim our "inheritance" as a "child of God" and heirs to the promises made to Abraham. "Children" need strict "laws" to protect them until they have enough experience to understand the "spirit of the law". We discipline our children because we love them and want to protect them. God gave the "Law" to protect His people and give them rules for living together in harmony. The "Law" united the Israelites into a "people", a nation of believers who, through trial and error learned that the "Law" was a better way of life than they had experienced as "lawless" vagabonds. Jesus did not "do away with" the "Law". Jesus expanded and explained the "Law" into personal responsibility so that we could "grow up" and become "adults" and have a personal relationship with our Father. The expanded "Law" gives FREEDOM. Adherence to God's law allows us to live lives of service and gratitude IF we can accept it and understand our FREEDOM in Christ Jesus. "You shall KNOW the TRUTH and the TRUTH will set you FREE." "God is no respecter of persons." I hope this makes these scriptures more relevant to us all.

Luke 8:26-39

Jesus and his disciples arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me" -- for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

It is obvious from the narrative that Christ traveled to "the country of the Gerasenes" via boat across the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Tiberius). In ancient times, and in some modern "sects" of Christianity, the concept of "disease caused by sin" and "demons" as a cause of infirmity is still "accepted theology". Flip Wilson made "the devil made me do it" part of our patois. The man in the story "had demons" as a cause of his nudity and a reason for his living in the "tombs". Even in his "madness" he recognized the power of Christ and the "demons" inside him begged for mercy. We all have our "demons" that keep us from being accepted in "polite society" and among many "churches". Please notice the "passivity" of Christ in this "healing". What if Christ had rejected and ignored this man? Jesus did not ignore or reject the man. Instead, he faced the demons "head on". Does the "presence" of Christ invoke "healing"? Too bad we don't allow Jesus to purge us of our demons. (Read the passage of Paul cited

above to understand the “freedom” we attain by our faith in Christ). My “demons” alone could take up a LARGE herd of swine. Pigs, be afraid, be very afraid. Note that the very “presence” of Christ compelled the “demons” to leave the man and enter the swine. THEN, the swine ran over a cliff into the “lake” and were drowned. The “change” in the man was apparent as he sat calmly, clothed and “in his right mind”. Can we “heal” mental illness in our churches? Sometimes, God sends us a healing miracle and sometimes, God sends us good doctors and good medicines. I know people who refuse to take medications or seek psychiatric care because they are “waiting on God to heal them”. I have seen miracles of healing occur during my many years of practice. Did God “do it” or did God’s ministers (doctors and nurses and pharmacists and others) do the “healing”. The wise “physician” gives the glory to God from whom ALL healing comes. The reason this story does not end with the removal of the demons is that the swine belonged to someone other than the “healed man” so their deaths cost the owners MONEY. The swineherds did not want to be blamed for the loss of the pigs so they ran to tell the owners that Jesus had killed their swine? The healing of the man caused the people to “be afraid”? We always fear what we do not understand. The best “cure” for fear is education and enlightenment. The healed man wanted to go with Jesus but, Jesus wanted him to go home and TELL others how much God had done for him. Healing should cause us to praise God and to proclaim all that has been done for us. Those who have been healed must be grateful and SHOW IT. IF we believe that we have physical infirmity because of “sin” or “demons”, we should praise God for our “healing”. Why do we have healing services and people are not healed? Is it because our faith is weak? Note that the man in the story did not ASK to be healed. The “demons” did the talking. Do we shun people with physical and mental illness out of fear that it is “catching”? Is there any “healing” apart from God? Does God “hear us” when we cry out for healing? What has been your experience? Does “You have not because you ask not” apply here? Is our concept that “Health is the absence of disease” wrong? Dying, cancer, tornados, hurricanes, and other “natural phenomena” are “natural”. Is healing in our bodies the answer to our dilemma? Being “healed” of sin is equated with “salvation” which is played out in eternity. Being “healed” of physical infirmity exists only in our present earthly lives. Everyone dies, period. It is what happens AFTER death that matters. Healing our relationship with our Creator should be our prime concern and then, the physical healing becomes less important in the big picture. Education stops fear. Salvation stops fear of dying so that we can live our lives to the fullest. Living is much more than breathing. We were given life for a purpose and those who understand THEIR purpose and live to fulfill it are the happiest and “healthiest” people upon the earth.