

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, June 27, 2010

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

Taken Up?

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This week's Lectionary readings:

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

It's late Wednesday night and I am exhausted. I have been out doing what I HATE all day long...asking people for money so that I can wage a reasonable campaign for County Judge. It is a character flaw of mine that I don't think I deserve all the kindness of people who give their hard-earned money for me to seek public office. I keep telling myself that it is a worthy cause. I get frustrated and depressed when I have trouble convincing people that I am telling them the truth. So many have become accustomed to lies and will not believe the truth. My father used to say, "People would rather climb a tree to hear a lie than stay on the ground and hear the truth." Truer words were never spoken. To learn the humility of begging, run for office. I will try again tomorrow when I am rested. I have over twelve tension-filled meetings scheduled for this week, so far. It is like that old dream of being naked in school or a "pop quiz" on a subject we have not studied. Some fears never subside no matter how old we get. I cleave to Paul's statement of faith: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." My motives are pure. My cause is just. So, I press on and keep my promises to not let campaigning interfere with this ministry of hope and understanding. I hope the readers appreciate my struggles to keep that promise. God knows. Running for office is unlimited opportunity for forgiveness for me and my opponent. Lord, help me to endure and remain aloof from politics as usual. I'm encouraged that the passages for this week speak to my humanity and my need for approval of my mission. The lesson: trust God, press on and give God the glory.

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

This is the story of Elijah's being "taken up" in a chariot "of fire". It was a planned departure witnessed by lots of folks. I have always wondered about Elisha's request of Elijah: "Please let me inherit a double share of your **spirit**." What SPIRIT? Was it Elijah's ATTITUDE or was it his God-given POWER? The price of the inheritance was that Elisha witness the "departure" of Elijah. Obviously, Elijah knew that his time was short. IF you knew your time was short, what would you say to those you love? Since we don't know when we will "be taken", NOW would be a good time to say those words. I suggest starting with "I love you". Everything else won't be remembered anyway. Note that Elijah DID NOT GUARANTEE that Elisha would receive his request. There are few guarantees in life except death and taxes. The difference is that "death" does not get worse every time Congress meets. Apparently, the "spirit" was transferred to Elisha because, when he struck the water with Elijah's mantle, the waters parted. What "spirit" will be transfer to our survivors? What attitude can we "give" our heirs? Was the "spirit" an attitude of "fearing God and obeying God"? What lesson does this passage teach us? When we lose those who are important in our lives, we must keep on living and use the "gifts" they leave behind?

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20 Page 693, BCP

Voce mea ad Dominum = "I will cry aloud to God." Watch those word orders and tenses.

1

*I will cry aloud to God; *
I will cry aloud, and he will hear me.*

2

*In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; *
my hands were stretched out by night and did not tire;
I refused to be comforted.*

11

*I will remember the works of the LORD, *
and call to mind your wonders of old time.*

12

*I will meditate on all your acts *
and ponder your mighty deeds.*

13

*Your way, O God, is holy; *
who is so great a god as our God?*

14

*You are the God who works wonders *
and have declared your power among the peoples.*

15

*By your strength you have redeemed your people, *
the children of Jacob and Joseph.*

16

*The waters saw you, O God;
the waters saw you and trembled; *
the very depths were shaken.*

17

*The clouds poured out water;
the skies thundered; *
your arrows flashed to and fro;*

18

*The sound of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world; *
the earth trembled and shook.*

19

*Your way was in the sea,
and your paths in the great waters, *
yet your footsteps were not seen.*

20

*You led your people like a flock *
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

This psalm is a plea for being led like Moses and Aaron led the people through the wilderness into the “Promised Land”. It is a plea for the presence of God as “shepherd” in the life of the psalmist. It is a prayer of deliverance and a request for God to be ever-present in our lives. Boy, howdy, do I need this psalm today. I could read and pray this psalm continually. “I need thee every hour most precious Lord. No tender voice like thine can PEACE afford. I need thee, Oh, I need thee. Every HOUR I need thee. Oh, bless me NOW, my Savior, I come to thee.” I hear God’s voice in music of many kinds. A psalm, in essence, is a SONG/PRAYER. Sing it. I tell you a great mystery: Music goes straight from our ears to our hearts and is a good way to learn scripture and spirituality. We ARE what we SING. “Sing and make melody IN YOUR HEART.” “Music hath power to soothe the savage breast”?

Galatians 5:1,13-25

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Scripture demands self-examination. In my “perfect world”, ***“For freedom Christ has set us FREE. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery”*** would be engraved on the hearts of every believer. “You shall know the TRUTH and the TRUTH shall set you FREE.” It might be carved on the

communion table just beneath “Do this in remembrance of me.” Why would anyone want to follow Jesus IF there was nothing to be gained from believing? FREEDOM is what we receive from God through Christ. This is the famous “Fruits of the Spirit” passage so often quoted from pulpits and in classes. It is another of those “compare and contrast” answers of Paul which details the alternative to “sin” as being ALIVE “in the Spirit” which produces the enumerated “fruits”. It is reflexive of “By their FRUITS ye shall know them.” Don’t tell me about your being “Spirit-filled”, SHOW ME. How do we know if we have the Spirit inside us and guiding us? We have the Spirit IF we produce the listed “fruits”. Are the “fruits” listed in chronological order? Is the “list” a progression from love to self-control? The list begins with LOVE and ends with self-control. Has that been my experience or have I “stopped” short in my growth “in the Spirit”? To those who arrogantly proclaimed themselves to be “self-made”, my father said, “They should not have stopped work so soon.” I think that the list is a progression of blessings that flow from love to self-control. What do you think? “Without love, I have become as a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal, a lot of noise without any meaning.” Unless we START with LOVE of self and of God, the process of “producing fruit” is soon abandoned and we can never attain self-control. God loves me unconditionally. Why would the believer (me) be harder on himself than God? Is it because I don’t “feel forgiven”? If Christ has “set me free”, why would I return to being a “slave” of fear? Why should I treat myself with such contempt if I am doing the best I can? I’m obviously not there yet but, please, be patient with me. God has not completed the “good work” that he began in me.

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Like Elijah, Christ knew that the day was soon approaching when He would be “taken up”. Note Luke’s contempt for the Samaritans so obvious in this passage. The Samaritans could tell that Jesus’ mind was set on getting to Jerusalem and not on their “problems” therefore, they rejected him. This chapped off the disciples, James and John, who asked “Lord, do you want US to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” How egotistical. Jesus REBUKED THEM and they went on to another village. What follows is a conversation that questioned the disciples’ devotion to “the cause”. It is a parable in an altered form. Some have used this passage to excuse them from taking care of their families. Jesus never demanded that we neglect our families to follow him. (If anything is not CONSISTENT with the overall message of Jesus, it should be questioned for its validity. This is but one problem of sequential “translations” and interpretations.) It fits with “windshields are big while rear-view mirrors are small.” Satchel Page once said, “Don’t look back, something might be gaining on you.” (There is an infrequent reference to baseball for the preacher’s benefit.) Anything that distracts us from following Christ is to be avoided. We can remain faithful to Christ and still live life, bury our dead relatives and be “in the world but, not OF the world.” This explanation is the only way I can make sense of this passage. Are these passages linked because they all speak of being torn between this life and life beyond this world? Hmmmmmm. Your guess is as good as mine.

There, it is done. I hope you find hope and peace in reading and reflecting on these words. Our attitude is still our most malleable asset. Our attitude is still the only thing in life over which we have control. The fruits of the Spirit end with self-control. Self-control (attitude) is a worthy goal for us all. “As a man (human) thinks IN HIS HEART, so is HE.” Perhaps we cannot “look DOWN” if we keep our eyes looking up? “Create IN ME a new heart” takes on a whole new meaning. “Change MY heart, Oh, God.”