

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, June 6, 2010

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

### **You think you have problems?**

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:

1 Kings 17:8-16 (17-24)

Psalm 146

Galatians 1:11-24

Luke 7:11-17

I am working late tonight trying to finish TWO weeks' worth of Lectionary Discussions so I can post them before I go on a week-long vacation. This vacation was postponed last summer because I had "emergency" back surgery. When the class discusses these passages, I will be in the Houston airport waiting to fly out to the Cayman Islands. No, I don't feel guilty because I haven't taken a real vacation in years. If I had it to do over, I would take MORE vacations. When you own your own business, you don't get "paid vacations". It is NOT a vacation unless you "vacate" the usual place and routine. I will be thinking of you while strolling the tropical shores dodging tar balls. "Even clowns must pray and prophets must play." See you back in a week, same bat time, and same bat channel.

### **1 Kings 17:8-16 (17-24)**

***The word of the LORD came to Elijah, saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.***

***[After this, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house at Zarephath, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." The LORD listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."]***

Two miracles in one passage? A lot was “happening” in the city of Zarephath, was it not? Elijah (one can remember that J comes before S, therefore, Eli”J”ah preceded Eli”S”ah.) The story of the cornucopia jug of oil and the jar of meal is a story of God’s supplying what was needed for the widow, her son and Elijah to survive the drought and famine that had seized the land. Texans know about drought from our recent paucity of rainfall only rivaled by the drought of the 1950’s. “We take the water for granted until the well runs dry.” We take our blessings for granted until we realize that they have been taken away. We miss friends and family once their loss finally becomes real to us. We believe that the rains will return and we believe that we will see our friends and family again in God’s good time. The widow had resigned herself to cooking a final meal for herself and her son because they had nothing else to eat and no hope of getting additional foodstuffs once the little that she had was eaten. Why did this story make it into scripture? Are we reliant upon God for our “necessities”? The “Lord’s Prayer” contains the phrase “give us THIS day our daily bread” for a reason. Note that, even though the oil vessel and the meal jar did not run dry, she still had to gather the wood to cook the food. Elijah was a “guest” so he probably did not gather the firewood? We still have to be “invested” in our blessings and show some gratitude? It was pure faith that allowed the widow to share her last food with Elijah. Her FAITH allowed the GRACE to SAVE her and her son’s lives (and the life of Elijah). It is always handy to have a prophet of God in the house in times of drought and famine.

Some time later, the same widow’s son fell ill and the woman blamed Elijah’s God for the death of the child. We sure blame God easily for our misfortunes and take a long time to THANK God for our blessings. Did Elijah blame God for the child’s “death”? This story is used as an example of a “resurrection” in the Hebrew Bible BEFORE the earthly life of Christ. (See the “Widow of Nain” story in the Luke passage for this week.) If we believe in ONE resurrection (Christ’s), why do we have so much trouble believing in several? Was it the Holy Spirit who

raised the child or Elijah? Is the KEY that ALL of the described “resurrections” involved the Holy Spirit (God)? Lazarus, like Christ, was also “dead” for three days before resurrection so, tell me how they are different? If the resurrected bodies “came back to life”, what is the difference between their “awakening” and the resurrection of Christ? ALL the other folks, besides Christ, who experienced “resurrection”, eventually died and were buried. The difference is that Christ died a “violent” death for “our sins”, was “resurrected” but did not DIE AGAIN to show US that resurrection without another death is possible. Hence, “O death, where is your victory? O grave, where is your sting?” (I Corinthians 15:55) That is why we STILL call Him the “Risen Savior”. All the other “resurrected” people are still dead and buried. The empty tomb is our “evidence” that Christ is ALIVE.

Believe it, or not.

### **Psalm 146 Page 803, BCP**

*Lauda, anima mea = Praise (the Lord), (O) my soul.* (In translating Latin, one has to “add” the inferred missing words to make it read like English.)

1

***Hallelujah!***

***Praise the LORD, O my soul! \****

***I will praise the LORD as long as I live;***

***I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.***

2

***Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, \*  
for there is no help in them.***

3

***When they breathe their last, they return to earth, \*  
and in that day their thoughts perish.***

4

***Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! \*  
whose hope is in the LORD their God;***

5

***Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them; \*  
who keeps his promise for ever;***

6

***Who gives justice to those who are oppressed, \*  
and food to those who hunger.***

7

***The LORD sets the prisoners free;  
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind; \*  
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;***

8

***The LORD loves the righteous;***

3

**the LORD cares for the stranger; \*  
he sustains the orphan and widow,  
but frustrates the way of the wicked.**

9

***The LORD shall reign for ever, \*  
your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.  
Hallelujah!***

The psalmist infers a difference between LIFE and an AFTERLIFE because of his description of the duty of mankind to praise the Lord and to be grateful while we are alive and dependent upon God for life itself. Even the “rulers” will eventually die and their “thoughts” will die with them. The reason for our justice and sustenance in THIS LIFE is the LORD, according to the psalmist. Was the Holy Spirit “alive” in the psalmist’s life? Do we agree with the psalmist? If the Lord is responsible for our very lives, we should be grateful, should we not? Like “thanking a veteran” for our freedom, we should thank the Lord for everything including the lives of the veterans? Of all the people on the earth, those who rely upon God should be the most grateful.

### **Galatians 1:11-24**

***I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.***

***You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.***

***Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.***

Is the terminology “Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit of the Lord” interchangeable? It seems that Paul spent most of his adult life of ministry apologizing for his youthful persecution of Christians. (A lot of our “youthful lacks of judgment and discretion” come back to haunt us. God has forgiven us but, the world never forgets.) Was Paul arrogant or was he just “self-assured”? If his

accomplishments were valid, was it bragging or was it just stating the facts? Was Paul “set apart” by God even before he was born? Were you and I “set apart” before we were born? How does that tie to the doctrine of “pre-destination”? Does the “called by God” through “grace” refer to the Damascus road episode? Was Paul claiming to be “special”? Paul started out in one direction (persecuting Christians to prove his hatred of Christ to the Jewish leaders) and ended up evangelizing the Jews AND Gentiles (to become Christians). That is TRUE “repentance”. Repentance means “to make a 180 degree turn” as a mule turns a 180 degree turn at the end of the row when plowing a field. Did Paul actually SEE Christ on the Road to Damascus or didn’t he? Was Paul a “real Apostle” or not? After three YEARS, Paul went to Jerusalem where he stayed fifteen days with Peter. Paul claimed that he was an Apostle but avoided the “other Apostles” except James the brother of Jesus? When did James the brother of Jesus become an Apostle? “Apostle” means “one sent out.” (I don’t recall seeing his name in either of the disparate lists of Apostles in Matthew 10, Mark 3:16 and Luke 6:13.) You can bet that James KNEW of Paul’s persecution of the Christians and the Paul AFTER the events on the road to Damascus so he could SEE the “change of direction” in Paul’s life. A good friend died recently and everyone who knew him before and after his conversion SAW that the CHANGE was real. The man did a “180” turn in mid-life that changed the lives of countless others and preached a most eloquent sermon of the power of God. The action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the “saved” produces “fruit” that is evident to those who observe our BEHAVIOR? Like in the life of Paul, can those around us SEE the “change” and glorify God because of us? Without the change and ACTION of salvation, what’s the point? If GRACE saved Paul, it became his anthem: “By GRACE are you saved.” Those who have received the “gift” of God’s grace are GRATEFUL and it SHOWS in our ACTS of LOVE and DEVOTION.

### **Luke 7:11-17**

***Soon after healing the centurion's slave, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.***

This tale is known as the “Widow of Nain” story. Feel free to “back up” and read the story of the “healing of the centurion’s slave” in preceding verses (7:1-10). Note that Jesus “had compassion on her” because he was her only son? In

those days, a woman was dependent on a male family member for support and defense. This is why one of the earliest mandates of the Church was to appoint “Deacons” to be sure that the “widows and orphans” were being fed, clothed and attended. From its beginning, the function of the Church has been to minister to those without a “voice” and to defend the “good” in society. Also, note that, in all the other “resurrections”, touch was part of the “healing”. In this incident, Jesus spoke to the dead man, like he did to Lazarus, and he was alive again. We assume that he eventually died and was buried. Jesus is often referred to as “the word” as in the preamble to the Book of John: “In the beginning was the WORD...” If God SPOKE and our world was “created”, cannot the “word” also revive a person who is part of that creation? Never discount the power of the spoken word, especially when spoken by God through the Holy Spirit. How did you and I receive the “word”? The reason that the crowd called Jesus a “great prophet” instead of God’s Son is that they KNEW the stories from the Hebrew Bible about the “resurrection” performed by Elijah that was described in the I Kings passage discussed previously. They ASSUMED that Jesus was “another of the prophets”. If Jesus was not present “in the flesh” in many of the resurrections (in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament), was the Holy Spirit the “operator” in the events? Did God, in the “form” of the Holy Spirit raise Jesus? Hopefully, we can have a new appreciation of the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout scripture. As in the concept of the “Trinity”, we can infer the presence of the Holy Spirit because of the ACTIONS performed without the Holy Spirit’s being given credit in the printed pages. The record shows that the Holy Spirit, as “part of God”, has always been alive and active throughout our history. If we find ourselves in “problems”, it would be wise to look around for the Holy Spirit. These four passages point to the ever-present Holy Spirit as “God WITH us”, teaching us, helping us, saving us, defending us, comforting us and on and on ad infinitum. The Holy Spirit is the Swiss Army knife of theology: whatever we need, it’s there when we need it. You think you have problems? Seek the “helper” which God has so graciously granted to those who believe.