

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, May 16, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas  
Seventh Sunday of Easter

### Telling the “future” in love

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:

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

John 17:20-26

### **Acts 16:16-34**

***With Paul and Silas, we came to Philippi in Macedonia, a Roman colony, and, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.***

***But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.***

***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the***

***same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.***

A lot of what I'm about to relate to you can be found in the footnotes of your Study Bible. I recommend study Bibles for those who are new to Bible study because of the maps and the reference materials they contain. This story is during Paul's SECOND missionary journey. The "travelers" were Luke the supposed "author", Paul and Silas. It contains the story of the girl who made a lot of money for her "owners" by "telling the fortunes" of people in Philippi. There were few Jews in Macedonia at this time and even fewer Christians (remember last week's story of Lydia?). Any religion had to be "approved" by Rome to be a "recognized religion". Judaism was recognized but Christianity was not. Christians (considered by most Macedonians as heretical Jews) were easy marks for any complaints by either Jews or Romans for "disobeying the law". "Soothsaying" was very common among ancient people. Most know of the "Oracle at Delphi" who played a major role in Greco-Roman history as she foretold the future for many would-be conquerors and generals. The Oracle was thought to be the "mouthpiece" of a snake that inhabited the caves of Delphi and the snake was the PYTHON. Since the "oracle" only gave the words of the "snake", she became known as the "Python" from which we get our name for the tropical snake of today. Do you believe in "fortune-telling"? Can anyone really "tell the future"? (Remember your answer. It will come up later.) Did Paul and Silas "scare the devil out of the girl"? The girl and the people who owned her obviously believed she possessed the "gift of divination" or they would not have complained? No, they complained because Paul and Silas ruined their BUSINESS and cost them shekels because the PEOPLE lost FAITH in her ability to "tell THEIR futures"? How did the "girl" know that Paul and Silas were servants of God and had the secret of salvation? How does anyone "get the message" of the availability of salvation through Jesus? Did the Holy Spirit "tell" the "fortune-teller" girl? The girl followed the two missionaries around for days until Paul got chapped off and "cast out the spirit" from the girl. Note that it did not "come out" immediately but, it came out that very HOUR. (Don't WE often expect God to "change" our circumstances IMMEDIATELY?) When the girl "came to her senses", the "owners" grabbed Paul and Silas (Christians thought to be Jews) and dragged them before the Roman authorities for "preaching an unauthorized religion's unlawful practices". That was not the "real issue" was it? They got the mob to join in and condemn Paul and Silas. Without a proper trial, the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing, flogged and thrown into prison. Without this "attack", trial and imprisonment, the "jailor" might not have been offered salvation. Once again, what man meant for harm, God turned into good?

Once imprisoned, Paul and Silas were not only in "jail", they were "chained" so that they could not possibly escape. The Roman rules were that a guard who allowed a prisoner to escape had to take the escaped prisoner's place and

punishment. It made “paying off the guards to let you escape” a virtual impossibility. After the “earthquake” (they are common along the Aegean Sea) when the security of the prison was breached, the guard KNEW that all the prisoners had escaped and he was about to take his own life to shorten the pain and humiliation of his “dereliction of duty”. Paul shouted out for the guard to stay his suicide because ALL the prisoners were still inside the prison. The jailer was so elated that Paul and Silas were still IN the prison that he fell at their feet and asked “**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**” Not only did he wash their flogging wounds, he took them to his home where, no doubt, the entire story so impressed the “household” that they all accepted Jesus and were baptized. The next day the magistrates sent soldiers TO THE JAILER’S HOUSE to tell Paul that they were “free to go” but, Paul reminded them that he was a Roman citizen and they had broken their own LAWS by imprisoning him without proper legal proceedings. Afraid that they had illegally flogged and imprisoned a Roman citizen, the MAGISTRATES came and escorted them out of town in order to cover their culpability. Paul and Silas then went to stay at the home of Lydia (remember last week’s story). Why is this story in the Bible? What should we learn from it? Note that, even after being beaten and unjustly imprisoned, Paul and Silas were praising God loudly enough that the other prisoners were able to hear them. Is the message: Even when we are hindered by circumstances, we are still capable of proclaiming Jesus? Is there any circumstance that can happen to us make us “lose our faith”? Is there any “good reason” for “losing our faith”? What would it take for me to “lose my faith” in God? The “easy answer” is NOTHING. The hard answer is “I HOPE I don’t ever find out.” Trust me on this one: if we live long enough, something will happen to test our faith to its limits. God does not “test us”. It’s just part of our human condition that “bad things still happen to good people.” Church membership and a crucifix are not “magical amulets” against the “troubles” of the world. Salvation is a “condition” that is eternal, long after this existence ceases? What do you think? Have you ever thought about it? Perhaps it is time we DO think about it? One thing it MIGHT teach us is to be more understanding of those who vacillate in their faith when they face “adversity” in life. “Bad” things will happen to saints and sinners alike. It is the ATTITUDE that will change the outcome for both. I ask you a question: What would make you lose your faith in God?

## **Psalm 97 Page 726, BCP**

*Dominus regnavit*

1

***The LORD is King;  
let the earth rejoice; \*  
let the multitude of the isles be glad.***

2

***Clouds and darkness are round about him, \*  
righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne.***

3

***A fire goes before him \*  
and burns up his enemies on every side.***

4

***His lightnings light up the world; \*  
the earth sees it and is afraid.***

5

***The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, \*  
at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.***

6

***The heavens declare his righteousness, \*  
and all the peoples see his glory.***

7

***Confounded be all who worship carved images  
and delight in false gods! \*  
Bow down before him, all you gods.***

8

***Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah rejoice, \*  
because of your judgments, O LORD.***

9

***For you are the LORD,  
most high over all the earth; \*  
you are exalted far above all gods.***

10

***The LORD loves those who hate evil; \*  
he preserves the lives of his saints  
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.***

11

***Light has sprung up for the righteous, \*  
and joyful gladness for those who are truehearted.***

12

***Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, \*  
and give thanks to his holy Name.***

The psalmist obviously thought that hating evil and loving good would be “protective” for the believer? Once again, even the ancients believed that ATTITUDE was primary in our salvation. Have you ever “escaped” a bad situation and thought it was a “miracle”? Was it because you “hated evil” or because you were “lucky” or because you had a “good attorney”? I submit that our “attitude” is more important than anything else. “Luck prefers the prepared mind.” God, prepare our ATTITUDES to be converted to hating evil and loving

good. A question for you: Are we HERE to “protect the GOOD”?

**Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21**

**At the end of the visions I, John, heard these words:**

**"See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."**

**Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.**

**"It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."**

**The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."**

**And let everyone who hears say, "Come."**

**And let everyone who is thirsty come.**

**Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.**

**The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."**

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!**

**The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.**

I'll bet that some readers scoffed at the very idea that the “girl” in Acts 16 could “predict the future”, didn't you? Well, if you DID scoff at her ability to “tell fortunes”, how do you deal with AN ENTIRE BOOK that contains John's VISION of REVELATION that “predicts the future” and predicts the “future fortune of the Church”? Don't be “religiously schizophrenic”. Which way is it? John had a “vision” and described future events in terms that he understood AT the time of his writing. The “girl” in Acts did the same thing. Why is one more “valid” than the other? Is this why these scriptures are linked in this week's Lectionary scriptures? Hmmmmmmmmm? Really? It is “customary” for all those who “speak in tongues”, “tell the future”, “tell your fortune” and even the “Oracle” at Delphi, to speak in open-ended language that might be interpreted in many ways. This is “fortune-telling” double-speak that allows the hearer or reader of the prophecy to “interpret” the predictions based on their ATTITUDE toward the predictions and the “prognosticator”. Who do you trust to “tell your future”? Has your future already been “written”? IF you could tell the “future”, would you REALLY want to know it? Salvation makes “knowing the future” a moot point, doesn't it? Salvation FREES us to LIVE every day in FAITH and HOPE of eternal LIFE. Therefore, to the “saved”, what happens today or tomorrow is nothing but a butterfly's dream. Do we believe like Paul that “to live is Christ, to die is gain”? I offer you another good question to think about this week: does anything other than eternal salvation really matter?

**John 17:20-26**

**Jesus prayed for his disciples, and then he said. "I ask NOT ONLY ON BEHALF of these, but also on behalf of those who WILL believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I**

***am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.***

***"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."***

One might call this passage from John, "The Unity Prayer" of Jesus. For whom is Jesus praying this prayer? Is it for himself? Is it for those who were with him at the time or was it for someone else? It is my opinion (take it or leave it) that this prayer is aimed at everyone in the PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE who will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is a prayer that our ATTITUDE be changed into one of UNITY with each OTHER believer with Christ as our "polar star" around which there is no disagreement. OUR UNITY is not only for OUR benefit, it will also benefit those who we hope to evangelize about salvation through Christ. IF we are NOT UNIFIED, how will they know who WE LOVE AND FOLLOW? Do we confuse people with our disunity? Do we "turn people off" to Christ because of our in-fighting over dogma and doctrinal differences? I think we do and it sickens me to the core. We "split" into sects and factions over "opinions" and it must grieve our Lord. IF we do not unify in Christ, we obviate the entire mission of Christ's coming, don't we? Look at the last paragraph of this passage:

***"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."***

Christ was born and lived among us for about thirty-three years trying to SHOW US THAT GOD LOVES US and that we should be UNITED IN GOD'S LOVE. IF we are not united around this central issue, we cancel out all the things that Jesus tried to teach us. Christ's message was simple: GOD IS LOVE and IF YOU LOVE GOD, you will LOVE EACH OTHER so much that OTHERS WILL KNOW THAT GOD LOVES US AS MUCH AS HE LOVES HIS ONLY SON. Can we at least agree on this point? Every encounter that John records between Christ and any individual or small group centers around GOD'S LOVE for EACH of his CREATIONS, EQUALLY. Perhaps we fail because it is beyond our comprehension that the CREATOR of everything LOVES US AS MUCH AS HIMSELF, HIS ONLY SON? The psalmist asked "What is man that you are mindful of him?" Are we still questioning the LOVE of God? Unless we accept the LOVE OF GOD as valid and immutable, we have denied Christ and his message. How can we call ourselves "Christians" IF we don't OBEY his request

for us to LOVE EACH OTHER as GOD LOVES US? This is but another question that we need to ask ourselves and think about the answer as “adult Christians”. Do I LOVE AS GOD LOVES? What is my ATTITUDE towards others who are EQUALLY LOVED by GOD? If FAITH is a choice, so is LOVING EACH OTHER. It is my opinion that, the greater my FAITH, the greater my ability to LOVE. The more we LOVE, the more we are able to LOVE? By changing my ATTITUDE to be commensurate with the “Unity Prayer” of Christ, I become a “joint heir” to its blessing and its power. How can we be UNITED in CHRIST as long as we don’t truly LOVE EACH OTHER? We will be talking more about this as we discuss the approach of Pentecost. AS in politics, those who are egotistical and unwilling to admit that they might be WRONG about minute dogma can never be truly united. **“Love one another as I have loved you”** is NOT a suggestion. It is a COMMAND for our benefit. How can we become UNIFIED? What am I willing to do to be UNITED with my fellow believers? What things are “negotiable” and what things are immutable? These are hard questions that must be answered by each who seeks a personal relationship with the Creator. Jesus told ME: **“If you LOVE me, keep my commandments.”**

*Don't trust my quoting scriptures from memory, which I do each week. Bring your concordance to class and I will show you how to find the “book, chapter and verse” for each of these scriptures so you can check out my memory and learn new skills for study.*