

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, May 23, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas
Whitsunday (look it up)

Wholly Spirit

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 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Romans 8:14-17

John 14:8-17, (25-27)

This week's discussion is primarily about the "coming of the Holy Spirit" and the "beginning of the 'Church'". Many of us do not understand God or Jesus so, why should we understand the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit has many "functions" in the life of the believer. These passages only touch the fringe of the subject and are important as a starting place for our education and edification. Read carefully what the scriptures say and then read what I have written. We DO NOT HAVE TO AGREE. My purpose is only one of encouraging the reader to THINK FOR THEMSELVES. Read these passages as though they are NEW to you and read them aloud to yourself so that you will hear YOUR VOICE which will better penetrate the "noise" that often keeps out the truth. I hope to ask the reader some new questions in order for us to get down to the "meat" of the passages. What would you have seen and heard had you been eye-witnesses to the words and the events? One of the difficulties of e-mail versus a phone call is that we cannot hear the intonation in the voice of the writer. Better than a phone call is a face-to-face encounter so that we might interpret the facial expressions AND the vocal tone of the speaker. We have a handicap...we have ONLY the "e-mail" of scripture to give us clues to what was actually said and done. Now, let us go "through the looking glass" and "down the rabbit-hole" and see what we can learn. We are physical creatures housing a spiritual entity?

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia,

Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

***'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'***

Pentecost was a JEWISH festival long before we Christians usurped it for our purposes. Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem for the Pentecost celebration and were present FIFTY DAYS AFTER PASSOVER Sabbath. (Seven Sabbaths plus one day equals 50. That's why we Christians celebrate the "seven Sundays of Easter".) Please note that both Passover and Pentecost are JEWISH DATES. The word "Easter" is not mentioned in the New Testament. The Jews had no reason to celebrate the death of Jesus or his "resurrection" any more than we might celebrate the death of a terrorist today. To the average Jew, Jesus was a heretical terrorist trouble-maker who deserved crucifixion. They had cried out for his death as a GROUP. Only a few who believed Jesus was the Messiah remembered the events of "Holy Week". These people (Jews from Jerusalem and the entire "known world") were merely mingling around when they were attracted by the SOUND of the "wind" and the FIRE tongues. Peter could have been nothing more than a carnival barker selling "snake oil" to the crowd. He even had to shout and demand their attention to his sermon. He started out by quoting from the Book of Joel, their own scripture of prophecy, to validate the events they were experiencing. The

crowd was amazed to HEAR their OWN LANGUAGE coming out of the mouths of people who had never learned their language and dialects. So, the Holy Spirit allowed the believers to DO and SAY things that, ordinarily, they would have been unable to accomplish? Are WE believers? Do WE have the Holy Spirit in us? What has the Holy Spirit allowed us to do “above and beyond” what we should be able to accomplish? When was the last time the “Holy Spirit” allowed you to say or do something for someone that, ordinarily, you would have been unable to do? We become alive and able to do many things simply by acknowledging that, as Paul put it “I can do ALL THINGS through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.” Paul knew it. Do we?

Psalm 104:25-35, 37b Page 736, BCP

Benedic, anima mea

25

*O LORD, how manifold are your works! *
in wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.*

26

*Yonder is the great and wide sea
with its living things too many to number, *
creatures both small and great.*

27

*There move the ships,
and there is that Leviathan, *
which you have made for the sport of it.*

28

*All of them look to you *
to give them their food in due season.*

29

*You give it to them; they gather it; *
you open your hand, and they are filled with good things.*

30

*You hide your face, and they are terrified; *
you take away their breath,
and they die and return to their dust.*

31

*You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; *
and so you renew the face of the earth.*

32

*May the glory of the LORD endure for ever; *
may the LORD rejoice in all his works.*

33

**He looks at the earth and it trembles; *
he touches the mountains and they smoke.**

34

**I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; *
I will praise my God while I have my being.**

35

**May these words of mine please him; *
I will rejoice in the LORD.**

37b

Hallelujah!

Have you ever thought about that God MADE you exactly like He wanted you to be? The Latin title of this psalm is “*Benedic, anima mea*”, which could be loosely translated as “*Blessed One, who gives me life*”. God made us through the miracle of birth with PURPOSE. What is that purpose? Not only did he make us, He gave us his only Son to teach us and live among us, THEN, he gave HIS SPIRIT to live IN US because we have honored the gift of Jesus by believing on Him. We were not “left alone” or abandoned like a foundling on the doorstep. We have a “guardian angel” called the Holy Spirit which functions as our benefactor, teacher, comforter, lawyer, sibling, confidant, etc. Think of anything necessary for accomplishing whatever God has purposely planned for OUR LIFE and the Holy Spirit is ready and able to allow us to accomplish what is necessary. That is VERY POWERFUL and hopeful. Long life is NOT the goal. Success is NOT the goal. Money is NOT the goal. Living with PURPOSE to fulfill our PURPOSE and obey the WILL OF THE FATHER is our ultimate reason for existing. What has God’s Holy Spirit’s presence allowed US to accomplish to God’s glory? Until we acknowledge and accept the Holy Spirit and become WHOLLY SPIRIT, we are hindered only by our lack of faith and acceptance. We must become ONE IN THE SPIRIT to fulfill our destiny in the Lord. How do we do this?

Romans 8:14-17

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Once again, Paul gets down to the “nitty-gritty” in one simple sentence. Our allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us in all aspects of life allows us to be truly “Children of God”. We are children of God because we were MADE by God. Obedient children have the Holy Spirit and are LEAD by the Spirit of our Father. It is not a Spirit of enslavement but, it is a Spirit of FREEDOM. Paul told Timothy, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but, one of POWER and of

LOVE.” This is a continuing theme in Paul’s writings because it was so much a part of his journey of faith. Can we sense the presence of the Holy Spirit? If we do, does it give us a feeling of boldness and power? The presence of the Holy Spirit was never meant to give us POWER OVER PEOPLE or to divide us. The Holy Spirit was given to UNITE US. The Holy Spirit is our witness to our ADOPTION and is cause for celebration. Adopted children should feel more special than “birth children” because their “parents” CHOSE THEM knowing what they were getting. Birth parents play the lottery and are stuck with the “luck of the draw”. We were CHOSEN, SELECTED, MADE especially for a PURPOSE. We were NOT ABANDONED. Can we get this through our hard hearts? We can when it becomes “all about God” and not about ME. Is the Holy Spirit a burden to us? If so, we do not understand the purpose of the Holy Spirit and will never understand our purpose. “WHEN the student is ready, the TEACHER will appear.” Are we ready to learn? Are we ready to become “wholly Spirit”?

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

["I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."]

This passage perfectly illustrates the issue of “being there” versus “reading about being there”. Can you sense the irony and the frustration in the voice of Jesus when he asks, ***“Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?”*** How long has “Jesus’ Spirit” been with US and yet we do not KNOW the Holy Spirit? This ***“If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it”*** is the “reason” why we end our “prayers” with “In the name of Jesus...” I want the reader to back up and, once again, READ ALOUD the second and third

“paragraphs” of this passage. DID YOU GET IT? DID YOU HEAR THE VOICE SPEAKING TO YOU? Faith is often a “chain” event: we believe in God, then, we believe in Jesus BUT we don’t believe in the existence of the Holy Spirit? You’ve got to be kidding me? Faith in Jesus is LINKED to faith in God and faith in the Holy Spirit is linked to faith in both God and Jesus. It is very difficult, logically, to believe in only one or two of the three. Jesus addresses this issue most directly in these words from John’s gospel. IF we don’t know the Spirit, how can we say we “know Jesus” or “know God”? One might say that the Holy Spirit is “God WITH US” in a very personal way even more than the Emmanuel “God with us” that existed on earth during the physical life of Christ. BUT, the Holy Spirit is an INVITED GUEST. Would we invite someone home with us and then IGNORE their presence? Would we invite Christ to our home and IGNORE His presence? This is not spiritual “hide and seek”. The Spirit was promised. The Spirit is there through our faith in Christ. When will we acknowledge and learn from this wonderful gift of the Father? When will we become “wholly Spirit”? As the Hebrew Bible recounts “My people PERISH for lack of knowledge (understanding, wisdom)”. We have NO EXCUSE because God sent us a tutor: the Holy Spirit. How long will we live in our ignorance? Jesus asks us “IF you believe in the Father, believe also in me”. This could be continued as “AND believe in my promise to send the Advocate (Holy Spirit) when I am no longer physically in your presence.” I guess I’ll have to put that in MY version of the New Testament when I get around to writing it? Don’t hold your breath. We have just touched the fringe of the subject of the “functions of the Holy Spirit”. Our journey toward enlightenment has begun by our acknowledgement of the presence of the Holy Spirit. First, ask yourself, “Do I have the Holy Spirit?” We have a lot of work to do if we cannot answer YES. We will go further “down the rabbit-hole” and challenge our faith and our understanding as we attempt to become “wholly Spirit”. God, take our hand and lead us on.