

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, May 2, 2010

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

The “Love Feast” revisited

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 11:1-18

Psalm 148

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13:31-35

These are “hard” scriptures“ for some to digest because they may fly in the face of what we have accepted as “gospel” for so long. My “good news” is written in chalk and “erased or amended” each time I read or study, I find traces of what was previously written as “truth” shows through even though I may be writing anew something that I KNEW was the “truth” just a while ago. Can something we “learned” previously be truly “erased”? “Truth” can be “relative”? What do I KNOW today that I only THOUGHT I knew yesterday? Have we changed our “opinions” on some major issue in the past year, weeks or days? If not, our hearts and our brains are probably dead and incapable of learning something new. The mere fact that you are reading this discourse indicates that your brains are NOT dead and I commend your bravery and intellectually adventurous nature. We do not have to agree. I only ask that you entertain some new thoughts.

Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me,

and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, `Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, `John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' IF then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

I guess it has always been true in Christendom that our harshest critics are from among our "brothers and sisters" in Christ. Who could have doubted the sincerity of Peter? They heard a "rumor" that Peter had offered the Holy Spirit to GENTILES? Could this be true, surely not? They all knew and respected Peter as having been their "leader" since the Lords' Ascension. The "circumcised believers", read Jewish converts, were upset that Peter had shared the Spirit with Gentiles, the "uncircumcised". Peter had to explain the situation to them in plain terms, step by step. He explained his "vision" in which God showed him that his Spirit and salvation were to be made available to ALL PEOPLE. (God, in the "vision", tried to get him to eat "unclean" animals".) The vision happened "three times" in keeping with Jewish validity so that it could not be happenstance. What is contained herein is classical logic for the time. Peter was no ordinary "fisherman". He had a great mind and a huge heart for God. He even quoted Jesus' words that "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then the "mighty IF" occurs: "IF then God gave THEM the SAME gift that he gave US when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could HINDER GOD?" That shut them up quickly. How could they argue with God and Peter? With this explanation, they accepted that the Gentiles were now adopted heirs of the same salvation that Jesus had first made available to the Jews. Apparently, Peter convinced them of the validity of his arguments for his actions. Once they were convinced, the Holy Spirit became widespread and the salvation was preached to anyone and everyone and we are its benefactors. Hallelujah! Another truism: God is God and you and I are NOT. God gets to choose from all people and all nations who he will save and the rest is history. Again, I say, Hallelujah!

Psalm 148 Page 805, BCP

Laudate Dominum

1

Hallelujah!

2

- Praise the LORD from the heavens; *
praise him in the heights.***
- 2**
- Praise him, all you angels of his; *
praise him, all his host.***
- 3**
- Praise him, sun and moon; *
praise him, all you shining stars.***
- 4**
- Praise him, heaven of heavens, *
and you waters above the heavens.***
- 5**
- Let them praise the Name of the LORD; *
for he commanded, and they were created.***
- 6**
- He made them stand fast for ever and ever; *
he gave them a law which shall not pass away.***
- 7**
- Praise the LORD from the earth, *
you sea-monsters and all deeps;***
- 8**
- Fire and hail, snow and fog, *
tempestuous wind, doing his will;***
- 9**
- Mountains and all hills, *
fruit trees and all cedars;***
- 10**
- Wild beasts and all cattle, *
creeping things and winged birds;***
- 11**
- Kings of the earth and all peoples, *
princes and all rulers of the world;***
- 12**
- Young men and maidens, *
old and young together.***
- 13**
- Let them praise the Name of the LORD, *
for his Name only is exalted,
his splendor is over earth and heaven.***
- 14**
- He has raised up strength for his people
and praise for all his loyal servants, ****

***the children of Israel, a people who are near him.
Hallelujah!***

As if you could not have translated the Hebrew, "Hallelujah" means "Praise the Lord". Notice how many times praise is attributed to the Lord in this one short psalm. Does our "seeing" God in our lives and in our world cause our exclamation of "Hallelujah"? Have we "looked" for God? Show me people who "see God's presence" in all of life and I'll show you people full of gratitude and praise.

Revelation 21:1-6

I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals.

***He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.***

***Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away."***

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."

If you have learned nothing else, learn this: OUR GOD IS THE GOD OF THE NEW BEGINNING. Again and again God gives us the opportunity to repent and start over. It does not matter who we are, what we have done or what we haven't done...God says "COME TO ME AND I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW BEGINNING." This IS the good news of all scripture: when we change our ATTITUDE, we can change our ALTITUDE more toward God's kingdom, rise from our ashes and START OVER.

John 13:31-35

At the last supper, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this

everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The "friends" were having a supper together. None of them realized that it was to be their last formal meal together. They were celebrating the Passover which commemorated God's "starting over" by separating the obedient Israelites (those who celebrated Passover as codified and practiced at the command of God) from among those who were captives in Egypt. In this passage, Judas had been exposed as the "betrayers" and had left to make the arrangements with the Jews to point out Jesus to the Temple guards when they came to arrest him. Each time we "commune" together, it may be our last time to "eat a meal with our 'family'" in this life. Jesus tried to comfort them and inform them but, they were not very receptive to his entreaties. Be kind to those who ate with Jesus because we would probably have acted no differently, would we? Now for a challenging thought for some of us: Do we actually "practice" communion as completely as we were commanded? Why do you think John included these sentences "about loving each other" in his passages concerning the "Last Supper"? Each time we celebrate communion, we are asked to repent, ask forgiveness and "start over" but, do we take the opportunity to "start over" or do we, like the disciples at the table with Jesus, miss the opportunity? Jesus says "Come, leave your cares and burdens HERE with me. Leave your "garbage" here with me and spend just a little time in my presence. As in the Passover Feast, let the "Angel of Death" pass over you because the blood of the "lamb" is covering the entrance to your heart. Along with the opportunity to begin again came the imperative to "love one another just as I have loved you." This assumes that they loved Jesus and that they were capable of loving each other, did it not? When we gather around the communion table, we are compelled by the blood and body of Christ to commit the same to each other. Have you ever thought about this? Is this how we feel about those who partake in communion with us? Who are we to say who can and who cannot commune with Jesus? We eat, we drink and we remember but, what do we remember? We remember the "sacrifice" of Jesus' body and blood but, for what purpose? Learn this: I alone am responsible for communing with MY LORD. It is the attitude of the one partaking that truly matters, isn't it? The purpose in communion that convicts me is that Jesus says "IF you love me, love each other and by loving each other, it will confirm to those who are not currently here that you are part of my ministry and that I am the "Lamb of God" whose death is worthy of your respect and love for each other." Run this through your brain and see if you can understand it: Jesus says, "If I LOVE YOU, then you should be able to LOVE EACH OTHER and anyone who LOVES ME." Therefore, in my opinion, we are compelled to EAT, DRINK, REMEMBER and LOVE EACH OTHER. That will make it a true "Love Feast" that will change the world. There is no magic in eating and drinking. What makes the event productive is in the follow-up that comes AFTER eating and drinking. It is the LOVE that happens between us BETWEEN communion opportunities that pleases our LORD and makes the sacrifice meaningful and our partaking "worthy". It is just my opinion and I could be wrong

but, I doubt it. Think about this the next time you partake of the communion emblems: God wants us to start over loving HIM and loving EACH OTHER.