

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, November 1, 2009

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

Freedom under God's sovereignty

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.

The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

Americans, in particular, have a hard time understanding or practicing being under the "sovereignty" of anyone or any government. At least, they used to. I submit the definition of the word "sovereignty" for your edification and thought:

sov-er-eign-ty (sŏv'ēr-īn-tē, sŏv'īn-)

n. pl. sov-er-eign-ties

1. Supremacy of authority or rule as exercised by a sovereign or sovereign state.
2. Royal rank, authority, or power.
3. Complete independence and self-government.
4. A territory existing as an independent state.

Let's look at these passages with the idea of the "sovereignty of God" in our minds. Freedom IS under the sovereignty of God.

Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples

a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,

of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain

the shroud that is cast over all peoples,

the sheet that is spread over all nations;

he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,

and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day,

Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.

This is the LORD for whom we have waited;

let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Isaiah was NOT aware of cholesterol's reputation in our modern world. Of course, Isaiah was not talking about physical "food". He was talking about the sovereignty of God over ALL creation and the blessings of freedom and grace

that would be made available. God has the **power** to bless or to punish. The choice of which we receive is based on the grace of God to whom we offer our service of worship and ministry. Which we “earn” is not part of the deal. Our acknowledgement of God’s SOVEREIGNTY is what creates the relationship in which we receive blessing. The obedience of the people and their repentance and return to being under God’s sovereignty is what opened up the grace and mercy foretold by Isaiah. He was prophesying the coming of “Messiah” who would be “God with us...Emmanuel”. The Messiah has come to us. Have we acknowledged his sovereignty over OUR lives? There is great freedom available to those who become “willing slaves” and acknowledge God’s sovereignty over us. **There is FREEDOM under God’s sovereignty.**

Psalm 24

1

The earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it, *
the world and all who dwell therein.

2

**For it is he who founded it upon the seas *
and made it firm upon the rivers of the deep.**

3

**"Who can ascend the hill of the LORD? *
and who can stand in his holy place?"**

4

**"Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, *
who have not pledged themselves to falsehood,
nor sworn by what is a fraud.**

5

**They shall receive a blessing from the LORD *
and a just reward from the God of their salvation."**

6

**Such is the generation of those who seek him, *
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.**

7

**Lift up your heads, O gates;
lift them high, O everlasting doors; *
and the King of glory shall come in.**

8

**"Who is this King of glory?" *
"The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle."**

9

2

**Lift up your heads, O gates;
lift them high, O everlasting doors; *
and the King of glory shall come in.**

10

**"Who is he, this King of glory?" *
"The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory."**

I apologize that this is "third year seminary" material. There are no "Cliff Notes" for my writings so I will try my best to explain the logic. Nothing I find in scripture REQUIRES my leaving my "mind" or "good sense" or "logic" at the church house door. God gave us minds to learn and to discover "God" for ourselves. God wants us to be fully able to say, **"I KNOW whom I have believed..."** What we work to attain, we honor and appreciate. **"Work out your OWN salvation with respect and awe..."** comes to mind. Psalm 24 is homage to the sovereignty of God over our lives. Is the psalmist correct that those who seek God find God? One of the great surprises in life is that the "God" we "find" is seldom the "God" we THOUGHT we were seeking when we began our search. Have you found the "God" you thought you would find when you began your search for God? Think about it. Are you satisfied with the "God" you have found or have you "accepted" someone else's concept of "God"? **"Where God is, there is peace."** IF you have found THE "God" and you are not blessed and at peace in the finding, perhaps you should keep looking? Is the problem with our finding "God" that we don't recognize God when we "see" God? If the "God" we seek is immoveable and immutable, then, it is logical that WE are changed by the journey back to finding "God". **"God" is not "lost", we are.** Where have we been looking for "God"? I am reminded of the country song "Looking for love in all the wrong places". IF "God" is everywhere and in everything, can we find "God" in the natural world? How about "finding God" in ourselves? (This does not mean that WE ARE GOD.) Au contraire, it implies that, IF "God" is truly IN US, then, there should be some evidence for God's presence in our lives. We find "tracks" in the sand and we look for the animal that created them. Why do we not seek the "creator" when we find "God's tracks" in our lives and the lives of those around us? I contend that finding "God" is often serendipity...we find "God" when we are least expecting to find "God". To Wesley, it was a "warm feeling". What told you that you had found "God"? Is "God" a "feeling", a "place", a "person" or an "abstraction" of our minds? God is in everything God created in the same way that the "art" contains "part" of the artist. The special relationship WE have with the Creator is based on our respect for "God" because we HAVE FOUND "GOD" and are blessed for our finding our Creator. The JOY exists in the journey of discovery as we learn about ourselves and the One who CREATED us. **"Who is he, this King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of Glory."** Only those who have found "God" and recognized God as LORD can enjoy this relationship. I find that there are as many "Gods" as there are seekers because "God" means different things to each of us. Those who

have found "God" should be the freest and the most joyous people on Earth because: ***There is FREEDOM under God's sovereignty.***

Revelation 21:1-6a

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."

"Armageddon" is the combination of two Hebrew words, "Har" (mountain) and "Megiddo" (the mountain region of Megiddo) which literally mean "The mountain of Megiddo", an infamous site of many bloody battles in Hebrew history.

"Armageddon" really exists as a "place" in the Holy Lands. Its portrayal in Revelation has come to be synonymous with "terrible destructive war, a FINAL battle". I must admit that I eschew "interpreting" anything in the Book of Revelation because I do not understand Jewish mysticism or "magical numbers". Revelation is "apocryphal" meaning "hidden". I find it ironic that a book of "apocrypha" is named REVELATION. Saint John the Divine, NOT John the Apostle, is the supposed author of the Book of Revelation. The words, the grammar and the imagery are NOT the same as John's Gospel writings. I tell people that I UNDERSTAND all I NEED to know about the Book of Revelation. It is very simple: At some time, there will be a great battle between God and the forces of evil and GOD WILL WIN. The end, period, done. Any other comments would be pure opinion and speculation. John the Divine was attempting to give the disciples HOPE and PEACE that God is in control and always has been in control regardless of who is King or President. Everything we "see" will disappear and God will save his people IN THE END. To display the Book of Revelation as total condemnation of things we don't understand would be folly. The summation is: There is FREEDOM in the sovereignty of the Lord God.

John 11:32-44

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also

weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Jesus delayed going to see Lazarus when he died. He was not that far away when he got the news. Why did he tarry and not go immediately to Lazarus? Did Jesus intend to "raise" Lazarus from the beginning? If Jesus did not intend on raising Lazarus, what changed his mind? Why won't Jesus "raise" our dead friends and family? Why would Jesus "allow" anyone to die? If we believe in Jesus, does Jesus "save" us? From what does Jesus "save" us if we ALL eventually die? Was the "miracle" in this story the "raising of Lazarus" or the "show" performed to force the "crowd" to believe in the divinity of Jesus? Have you seen Lazarus walking around? Since Lazarus cannot be found, we assume that Lazarus eventually "died" and was buried again. This places our temporal lives in perspective, doesn't it? What are we to learn from this narrative? Jesus "saves" us from the ETERNAL death which is "separation from the presence of God". Jesus DIED but, God raised him and returned him to Heaven to SHOW us that God keeps his promises. What happens to those who die and are not "believers"? Does God "raise" everyone but "save" only the "chosen ones"? ***"What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?"*** What does that mean? Where were we BEFORE we were born? IF we believe that we were WITH God prior to our birth, why did God separate us from His presence and send us to suffer in THIS life? Is God a cruel trickster? Why are we alive? Are the "kids" who die the "lucky" ones? Are these questions that only I have asked? We believe that "babies" return to God when they die as youths? Why are they given special dispensations? At what age do we become "sinners"? How does this effect "original sin"? As a resident in Catholic hospitals in San Antonio, I carried a supply of "holy water" at deliveries so that I could "baptize" babies in extremis or dying when a priest was unavailable. Why would a Protestant baptize babies? Did I commit a "sin"? I am reminded that ***"To him who knows to DO GOOD and doesn't do it, to HIM it is SIN."*** It was for the

comfort of the parents who wanted their babies to be “saved”. Did I do anything to “save” a baby with my acts of baptism? Infant baptism began, as a “necessity”, when infant mortality was very high and most babies died before their first birthday. It was an act of GRACE, MERCY, LOVE and COMFORT to the parents who wanted to be sure that they would see their dead infants again in the after-life. What’s wrong with that? If you are a person of faith and can do ANYTHING to comfort the ones left behind, you would “baptize” the babies just like I did. If not, how can you call yourself a “person of God”? “Christian” means “Christ-LIKE”. Jesus gave COMFORT to the women in Lazarus’ life and so I gave the parents COMFORT. Now, put that information into the context of THIS story. Jesus gave great comfort to these women by “raising” Lazarus to life. Could Jesus have “raised” himself? Could Jesus have “saved” his own life and avoided the cross? Jesus made a “conscious choice” to sacrifice his temporal “life” for the sins of the world. HE **CHOSE TO DIE**. GOD **CHOSE TO RAISE JESUS** and RETURN HIM to GOD’S PRESENCE. Jesus raised Lazarus and restored HOPE to everyone who witnessed the resurrection and made believers in his being Messiah. The resurrection must be believed as the central “proof” of God’s sovereignty. God willed that Jesus die and he willingly obeyed. The people who believe and accept the sovereignty of God over their very living or dying have the blessing and promise of God’s raising THEM as Jesus raised Lazarus and God raised Jesus. Then, Jesus gave US these words of COMFORT, ***“Don’t be sad. I go away to prepare a PLACE for YOU that, where I AM, there you may be also.”*** Believe and live FREE like you believe it. There is great FREEDOM in our acceptance of the SOVEREIGNTY of God.