

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, October 11, 2009

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

“Choose life and live it to the fullest”

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:

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Psalm 22:1-15

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:17-31

As promised, this week’s discussion is another “stop” on our planned “trip of logic” back to establishing a relationship with the Creator who will be welcomed during Advent. Please, pardon my personal information in this week’s discussion. I want each of us to fully enjoy life and to be people of faith as an example for “good” to those among our communities, our friends and our family. My friends among “the God Squad”, the “clergy”, confide to me (yes, even WISE “preachers” need advice and counsel) that this is one of the most common “problems” with which they have to deal. (Having known both sides of being a “preacher”, I have a ministry to preachers I learned from my beloved father-in-law who encouraged them to greater service.) I have wanted to “get this off my chest” for some time. IF we have FAITH in the salvation available through the grace of God, we need not suffer and feel hopeless. Last week’s discussion was about “integrity”. This week’s is about dealing with depression. May God bless each of us as we have our “blue” times and think ourselves helpless and hopeless. I show you “a more excellent way.” If this helps just one of the readers, it will have been informative and edifying. You have to read the passages in their proper order from top to bottom to “see” the logic of my argument. Okay, you can cheat and read the last one first IF you are depressed. Jesus came to “give us life” and “life in abundance”. Who can turn down “free advice” from a doctor, especially the “Great Physician”?

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

Then Job answered:

“Today also my complaint is bitter;

his hand is heavy despite my groaning.

Oh, that I knew where I might find him,

that I might come even to his dwelling!

I would lay my case before him,

and fill my mouth with arguments.

I would learn what he would answer me,

and understand what he would say to me.

Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?

No; but he would give heed to me.
There an upright person could REASON with him,
and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.

***"If I go forward, he is not there;
or backward, I cannot perceive him;
on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.
God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me;
If only I could vanish in darkness,
and thick darkness would cover my face!"***

Have you ever felt "lower than a snake's navel in a wagon rut"? Job gives an apt description of such a state of depression and loss. Some days, death would seem a reasonable way out of the troubles each of us faces. What reason can we find for hope and joy? Is it "reasonable" to be joyous when our senses and our situation screams "RUN, HIDE, BE AFRAID"? Thank God, most of us will never face the losses of Job. Our losses seem miniscule compared to the abject depression that Job must have realized. Loss is "relative" in the big picture. It is a matter of reference: It depends on the relationship that is lost with the death of a friend or family member. The closer the relationship we have, the deeper the loss. Think for a moment about the "worst thing that could happen to me." IF that doesn't happen, we are ahead of the game. Does the loss of a job even compare to the loss of a spouse? Does the loss of money compare to the loss of our health? Job lost it ALL. How could Job hope to escape this depression and loss? He relied on the justice of God to find him blameless of all charges and to restore him to health and happiness. It is the FAITH of Job and not his patience that saved him. The Book of Job is about HOPE that comes from FAITH rather than "patience" as is so often touted. Faith sustains us through the losses and depressions of life. A funny thing about FAITH is that it is a bridge to even more FAITH as we can witness the faithfulness of God to "get us through" the dark times in life. "Troubles" are what may "make us" or "break us". In the end, "Patience" is a "test of FAITH". When was the time when FAITH sustained you? You have a "witness", a "faith story" that only you can share and it might help others who are struggling in their "dark times". That "don't put your LIGHT under a bushel" is as much about exhibiting our FAITH as it is about anything else. Permit me to re-state it as "Let your FAITH so shine that others may see your FAITH and glorify the Father who is in Heaven" With Job as our example, that might be a more helpful vision for us.

Psalm 22:1-15

1

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? *
and are so far from my cry
and from the words of my distress?

2

O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer; *
by night as well, but I find no rest.

3

Yet you are the Holy One, *
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

4

Our forefathers put their trust in you; *
they trusted, and you delivered them.

5

They cried out to you and were delivered; *
they trusted in you and were not put to shame.

6

But as for me, I am a worm and no man, *
scorned by all and despised by the people.

7

All who see me laugh me to scorn; *
they curl their lips and wag their heads, saying,

8

"He trusted in the LORD; let him deliver him; *
let him rescue him, if he delights in him."

9

Yet you are he who took me out of the womb, *
and kept me safe upon my mother's breast.

10

I have been entrusted to you ever since I was born; *
you were my God when I was still in my mother's womb.

11

Be not far from me, for trouble is near, *
and there is none to help.

12

Many young bulls encircle me; *
strong bulls of Bashan surround me.

13

They open wide their jaws at me, *
like a ravening and a roaring lion.

14

3

**I am poured out like water;
all my bones are out of joint; *
my heart within my breast is melting wax.**

15

**My mouth is dried out like a pot-herd;
my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; *
and you have laid me in the dust of the grave.**

One good thing about “hitting bottom” is that it forces us to “look up” for help. Real growth of faith and trust comes from a relationship with those who are there with us in all of life, “good times” and “bad times”. A true “friend” is the one who is there when the “wheels come off the wagon” and we find ourselves in a ditch. David had his woes and looked for God. The Biblical account tells us that God answered his pleas and rescued him from his foes. This psalm represents just one episode in David’s life of “many woes”, many of his own creation. Does God get “tired” of hearing from us only when we are up to our necks in trouble? Do we have more FAITH in calling 911 than when we “call upon the Lord”? How shallow is our FAITH? God is there even if we don’t “see” God. Sometimes WE are sent to “represent” God. (It might help to reference the “Prayer of St. Francis”.) God’s face is our face to those in trouble and in need. God’s “reputation” is either affirmed or diminished by our FAITHFUL actions to help those suffering depression or loss. IF David could be depressed and “down” with all his “pull” with God, how much more can we suffer depression? The same FAITHFULNESS of God is available to you and me if we ask and look for it. This is why we need to have a relationship with God and His people when “times are good” so we can establish relationships of helping BEFORE they are needed. Trust me, hard times are coming. In the words of Jesus, ***“You have not because you ask not.”***

Hebrews 4:12-16

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We do not have a clear understanding of our relationship with God because we think in earthly terms with earthly minds. Since most of us have no

understanding of the “priesthood” and its function, talking in “Jewish” terms falls on deaf ears. The Jews (Hebrews) understood this from their Jewish background. All requests to God went through the priests and High Priest who made “requests” to God “sealed” by their “sacrifices”. Jesus is OUR HIGH PRIEST who supplants the need for an earthly High Priest. He made the “sacrifice” for you and me so that He can boldly approach God on our behalf. The basis for “our judgment” is the living word of God (Holy Spirit?) which is able to discern the very thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Our FAITH in the ability of Jesus to approach our Father in our depressions and times of loss frees us from being “helpless”. We have a High Priest, an “advocate”, a high-priced lawyer who goes to court and pleads our case and pays our “fines” with His own blood and body. All we have to do is to have FAITH and remain FAITHFUL to our commitment to being in a constant relationship with the Christ to make all of this available to us. Our FAITH opens up the opportunity for help in our depression and loss. WE are the problem in this scenario. Our lack of FAITH separates US from God. FAITH in the final analysis is the establishment of a relationship with God through Jesus and should make us the most joyous and “not depressed” people on earth. Remind me of this the next time I enter a “blue funk” or try to climb up on my “pity pot” and, as your friend, I will remind you.

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age--houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields

with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Jesus teaches a lesson in "word derivation" to this man. In Hebrew, it is a play on words with a point. The derivation of "good" is "God". When something is "good", it is, in reality, attributing it to God. Remember the song, "God is so GOOD"? Before I go any further, let me address the problem that is prevalent in many "churches". Some churches preach that taking any "medication" for depression or "seeing a shrink" is somehow "wrong". Sometimes, God sends us people and sometimes he sends us doctors and medications. When we have physical illness, we do not feel "sinful" or "weak" for seeking the best medical advice we can find. It has always been my experience that the more FAITH we have in our "helpers", the sooner we "feel better". When our marriage is "on the rocks", we need to seek help IF the marriage is important. Avoiding medical help is not "sinful" or "wrong", it is STUPID. If you are depressed for over six weeks, PLEASE take my advice and seek MEDICAL help. Luckily, most non-psychotic "depressions" lift in six weeks or less as we use our resources to "get help". Part of any depression is to avoid 'help". Don't STAY depressed and end up suicidal. GET HELP and enjoy life as it is the only life we are going to have and we suffer needlessly. My dear mother, God rest her soul, stayed "depressed" most of my life and did not seek help because of some fear of being called "weak" or "sinful" by members of the sect in which she worshipped. She remained depressed and it wrecked havoc on the lives of all those around her. I have forgiven her for her not seeking help. Don't let your family and friends suffer because of your not seeking help. There, I've said it and it needed to be said. It is neither "weak" nor "sinful" to seek help.

As to the last paragraph: Some have used this passage to disavow our possessing "wealth" as somehow "sinful". Jesus did not say that it was "impossible" to enter the kingdom of God and be wealthy. He did say it was HARD. Peter, the impetuous Apostle, thought only of himself and screamed "***LOOK, we have left everything and followed you.***" Peter gave up his family and a lucrative fishing business to follow Christ. The kingdom NEEDS people who have wealth to fund ministry and good works. In the "real world", money is necessary for the Church to minister and carry out its mandate to "Go into all the world..." The attitude of the person with money toward their wealth is the important point. This passage should be compared and contrasted with "The LOVE OF MONEY is the root of all kinds of evil." The "money" is an inanimate object lacking emotion or attitude. Our LOVE OF MONEY causes us the problems. IF the accumulation of MONEY is the GOAL of our lives, it becomes something that "separates us from God" and it is sinful. Those who earn money legally and within moral parameters need not be ashamed for their wealth. It is what they DO with the money that condemns or affirms them. Jesus puts money and "giving up everything" in perspective: "***But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.***" Those who "give" to be honored have their reward in the form of plaques and monuments and worldly "praise". Those who give to God have their reward in Heaven. Once again, it is the attitude of the person

with wealth that matters. Some of the most miserable people I know have lots of “money”. Some become “happy” when they give it away and free themselves from worrying about “someone taking it away”. This is paraphrased in the scripture, ***“Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupts nor thieves break through and steal.”*** There are more scriptures about money and wealth than there are about grace, hope, love, baptism, etc. God and Jesus KNEW we would have problems dealing with money and wealth. Humans are the strangest animals on earth. We get depressed when we have “too much money” and when we don’t have “enough money”. Once again, “Moderation in ALL things, even moderation” is the dictum of choice. WE choose to either stay depressed and not seek help or choose to not be depressed and get good advice and help. IF ***“Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen”***, then, depression is the antagonist of FAITH. God has provided a means of our living life to the fullest and pleasing him with our FAITH. The choice is ours. ***Choose life and live it to the fullest.***