

eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, October 4, 2009

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

“Speaking of integrity...”

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The Lectionary Readings for the week:

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

Psalm 26

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16

Scripture has quite a lot to say about integrity. What is your definition of “integrity”? Here is the dictionary version. How does it compare with scripture?

Integrity Defined from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary:

Main Entry: **in·teg·ri·ty**

Pronunciation: \in-¹te-grə-tē\

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle English *integrite*, from Middle French & Latin; Middle French *intégrité*, from Latin *integritat-*, *integritas*, from *integr-*, *integer* entire

Date: 14th century

1 : firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values : [INCORRUPTIBILITY](#)

2 : an unimpaired condition : [SOUNDNESS](#)

3 : the quality or state of being complete or undivided : [COMPLETENESS](#)

synonyms see [HONESTY](#)

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Job 1:1; 2:1-10

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." The

LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

The text upon which the Book of Job is based probably is, by chronology, the oldest book in scripture. The "author" most likely used an ancient Israelite text or oral tradition upon which to base the "book". It is thought to have been penned sometime between 2000-1000 B.C.E. The premise of the book deals with the nature of God versus human suffering. This is a polysyllabic word in theology: Theodicy. Theodicy is a big word with a lot of personal context. All of us struggle with the seeming indifference of God to human suffering. Who has not sat by and watched a cherished friend or family member suffer and asked God for help? Often, our extreme wish for the cessation of suffering will cause us to even pray FOR their death as a means of release from physical pain and suffering. We cannot believe that a just God would allow our friend or family to suffer when no one would hesitate to "put to sleep" an animal in such agony. Job suffered many losses but survived. This was HIS test of **integrity** despite the temptation of death's "end to it all" at the urgings of his "friends", his spouse and his advisors. The premise of the Book of Job is a dialogue between "Satan" and God in which "Satan" uses Job to test God. The story is as much a test of God as it is a test of Job. It is the "end" of the "myth" we have been taught from our youth. OUR myth is: Stay in school, get an education, keep out of trouble, and work hard and "everything will turn out great for you." "Growing up" means that we understand that OUR "myth" is not perfect and is very "conditional". It is a "fairy tale" we pass on to our kids so they will stay in school, eat their vegetables, stay out of trouble and grow up to be "productive citizens". The idea is "perfect" but the "facts" seldom turn out the way we wanted. Life is a series of "doing the next difficult thing" or "making the difficult decision" despite our desire to do something easy or more desirable. Some may refer to this as the "work ethic". Our benchmark for "perfection" lies outside ourselves because we think of "God" and "Satan" as forces outside our hearts, minds and bodies. In reality, the "war" is within us. The damage is done to our relationship with the Creator and we begin to doubt God's existence and our salvation. WE separate ourselves from God...God does not separate from us. In our despair, we question the very existence of God. What if we have believed a lie? What if God is no more real than the Easter Bunny? How can I have been so stupid? What has all this "being good" gotten me? Job's story is MY story and YOUR story. What is there in me that I will not give up to "save me"? Is it my health, my wealth, my friends, my family, my God, my integrity? Life is a series of choices poorly made by most of us. It is the mature person of God who can cling to their faith in God in all the adversities of life and "be still and KNOW that God

is". **Integrity** is persistence in doing good things despite evidence of our foolishness and poor choices. **Integrity** is who we are and what we do when no one is watching or will ever know that we did the "right" thing.

Psalm 26

1

*Give judgment for me, O LORD,
for I have lived with integrity; *
I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.*

2

*Test me, O LORD, and try me; *
examine my heart and my mind.*

3

*For your love is before my eyes; *
I have walked faithfully with you.*

4

*I have not sat with the worthless, *
nor do I consort with the deceitful.*

5

*I have hated the company of evildoers; *
I will not sit down with the wicked.*

6

*I will wash my hands in innocence, O LORD, *
that I may go in procession round your altar,*

7

*Singing aloud a song of thanksgiving *
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.*

8

*LORD, I love the house in which you dwell *
and the place where your glory abides.*

9

*Do not sweep me away with sinners, *
nor my life with those who thirst for blood,*

10

*Whose hands are full of evil plots, *
and their right hand full of bribes.*

11

*As for me, I will live with integrity; *
redeem me, O LORD, and have pity on me.*

12

*My foot stands on level ground; *
in the full assembly I will bless the LORD.*

Are you sure you want "integrity"? Be careful what you ask for or you just might

get it. The psalmist understood that **integrity** was central to a relationship with the Creator and the basis of our human relationships. To become real and to become “valuable” as an asset, INTEGRITY must be tested and challenged for its sincerity and validity. Integrity is the antithesis of “going along to get along”. **Integrity** is the action of God’s Spirit in our relationships with each other. **Integrity** is seeing the world through God’s eyes without thought for ourselves and allows us to understand that what we do and say matters.

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?

You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet." (Psalm 8:4-6)

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying,

"I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." (Psalm 22:22)

I think that those who selected these four verses for this Sunday had genius in their selections because they all relate to the concept of “**integrity**” as being central to our existence and our relationship with God and Christ. Paul was trying to convince and warn the Jewish converts (Hebrews) against reverting to Judaism. He was trying to show that the “perfected form” of our existence is to be INTEGRATED INTO (akin to “integrity”) the very being of Christ as the Holy Spirit is “integrated” into those who have accepted the Son as Savior. Paul does a LONG run to make a short slide. He expends a lot of theological capital in

order to convince the believers of their status in the Kingdom. He was quite literally “speaking to the choir” IF they were smart enough to follow the logic. Many folks are more “comfortable” in sects where the “rules” are set in stone and they don’t have to “think for themselves”. That is okay for “spiritual children” but, when we “mature as Christians” we have to take on the great responsibility of being answerable to God for our growth in spiritual matters. If we are not testing the limits of our potential or asking more questions than we can find answers, we are NOT GROWING and we lack **integrity**. Being a “zealot” is no excuse for being “stupid”. Zealots are to religion what surgeons are to medicine: “Often wrong but, never in doubt.” Zealotry is a form of childish behavior based on selfishness and the inability to see things objectively. To be a zealot demands that we cannot “see the forest for the trees” and negate the opinion of others. **Integrity** requires that we “integrate” new thoughts and insights into our hearts and minds so that we can “perfect” our spiritual beings. **Integrity** requires honesty in our viewing of our self and the opinions of others for their validity. **Integrity** is being able to take criticism, evaluate it for productive growth and reject the useless criticism. **Integrity** will allow us to perceive ourselves in the light of truth and to “perfect” our faith.

Mark 10:2-16

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

These Pharisees did not have **integrity** because their questions were not genuine. They asked a question in order to “trick” Jesus, thinking that they knew what his response would be. An important rule for any questioner: Don’t ask a question unless you can handle the answer. There is a world of “integrity” in the question, ***“Is it LAWFUL for a man to divorce his wife?”*** The Pharisees were

LAWYERS and thought they understood the Law and the mind of God. They were zealots of the worst ilk. Jesus answered their question with the answer they expected: It is wrong because man and wife are joined together in a bond sworn before God and the bond cannot be broken by the “laws of man”. Then, when apart from the “lawyers”, the disciples wanted to know more about this perplexing answer. It did not seem consistent with the “rebel against authority” they had come to know. Boy, were they disappointed with his answer: ***“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another spouse commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”*** Now let us parse these words like an attorney would parse testimony in a courtroom. An attorney would find that there is an “escape clause” in this answer: IF the one who divorces a spouse REMAINS single, there is no adultery. The adultery comes when they enter into ANOTHER oath before God BECAUSE they did not keep their initial promise. This is the reason that people should be fully aware before making ANY oath before God. To those facing this personal tragedy, I can only offer that God is the God of the second chance and there is forgiveness for ANY breach of God’s rules of conduct. God looks at who and what we are TODAY. The “mature” person with integrity accepts the judgment and moves on hoping to not make the same mistake again. The last paragraph demonstrates the nature of God toward US. God waits with open arms for those who seek him. Little children accept us with open arms, unconditionally...just the way WE should accept the love of God. The person who possesses **INTEGRITY** is humble, accepting of the frailties of others and open to learning new insights that will strengthen our relationship to God. **INTEGRITY** allows us to accept the truth of who we are and whose we are. **INTEGRITY** allows us to accept the love of God with open arms as believing children of the Creator.