

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, February 15, 2010**

With Ash Wednesday this week, the texts before us are those for Lent I of Year C, which is Sunday, February 21, 2010. Some great texts with one unifying theme being, "Remember Your Story." I recall the lines in Leslie Marmon Silko's great novel *Ceremony*, "The stories (of our people, Native Americans) are all that we have to keep us from illness and death. Without the stories, you don't have anything." I am in Montreal, where I am not only working with the hotel's Gideon Bible, but a Gideon Bible in French! I do read it better than I speak it.

### **Deuteronomy 26: 1 - 11**

One of the temptations or dangers of the Promised Land, according to Moses in Deuteronomy, is that the people will forget, that they will suffer amnesia about who they are and whose they are. The resources of the new land and their settled state will tempt them to assume this is how it has always been and how it will always be. They will forget their dependence on God and grace and come to think of themselves as entitled. Life will cease to be both gift and task and become guaranteed possession. So all of Deuteronomy is Moses' call to "remember." Here in Deuteronomy 26 an offering of the first fruits of the new and promised land is prescribed. At the heart of it is the recitation of the story or credo of Israel. "My father was a wandering Aramean . . ." As the church, what is our story? Do we know it? Can we tell it? Does it shape and inform us? What are the competing narratives of our promised land that would form us in different ways and order our lives toward different gods?

### **Romans 10: 8b - 13**

Paul riffs on another passage from Deuteronomy, Deut. 30: 11 - 14, to encourage the Romans to boldly confess their faith. Remember that bold confession of faith in the Lord Jesus in first century Rome had consequences! The matter of confessing one's faith does tie to the theme I've been developing here of story, remembering and telling it. Often in churches in No. America one hears a kind of "actions speak louder than words" cliché, that is of course true in some ways, the ways of which James reminds us. But here Paul works the other side of the street, reminding us of the power of bold, confident and yet modest confession of the truth we hold and the truth which holds us. He links this to the role of the preacher. One thing I often notice in contemporary preaching is that it often has little, too little, to say of God and from God, too little proclamation or confession of faith. It tends to be long on morality and moralism, what we should do or think or feel. Too often such preaching merely commends various conventional virtues shorn of context, story or confession. People are exhorted to entertain new thoughts, to be inclusive, not to judge and to take risks but there is little proclamation of the nature and purposes of God.

### **Luke 4: 1 - 13**

In the wilderness Jesus resists and thwarts temptation by reliance upon the Word of God, the story that names and claims him. In the Gideon Bible I am looking at here in a hotel room in Montreal they emphasize this by putting Jesus' responses, all words of Scripture, to the three temptations of the Devil in caps as well as quotes, as if to say, "Jesus said this really loudly." Of course, and this is the wonderful complication, the Devil also quotes Scripture. So merely quoting Scripture isn't in itself the point, though it may be a good place to start. The point is that Jesus' identity is grounded in God, in God's word and story, and so he is able to resist the Satan's attempts to make him anxious about who and whose he is. That invitation to anxiety is couched in the Satan's come-on, "If you are the Son of God . . ." These days we live in a society, and participate in churches, where there is a whole lot of anxiety going on. It makes us vulnerable. Niebuhr observed that anxiety, which comes with being human, is not in itself sin or sinful. But it is the precondition, the seedbed, so to speak, of sin. Our anxiety causes us to do things we shouldn't. So the antidote here to anxiety is faith, deep faith in God's presence and power, faith in God's sufficient word, and trust in the story that names us and delivers us from temptation. Preach it!