

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, February 22, 2010**

Here are my comments on the lessons of the Common Ecumenical Lectionary for Sunday, February 28, 2010, which is Lent II. The theme of the lessons is something like "Standing Firm."

### **Genesis 15: 1 - 12, 17 - 18**

Remember the old hymn, "Standing on the Promises"? Abraham is having trouble standing on the promises. He's slipping. The promises of God, that he and Sarah, will be father and mother of a great people, seem to be "just (as in "only") words." Where's the proof? Where's the meat? But the Word of God does change things. God renews God's word and promise to Abraham, and Abraham "believed," which God counted as "righteousness." Trusting the promises is righteous. By faith you are saved. Then the word is ratified by a covenant renewing rite, which is full of blood, smoke and deep darkness. To those of a Platonic sort of spirituality (nothing bodily or earthy please, let's keep it spiritual) this may be off-putting. But for us, there is no earth/ spirit, mind/ body dualism. Jesus is God in human flesh. There's blood.

### **Philippians 3: 17 - 4: 1**

If Abraham and Sarah are called to stand on the promises, Paul concludes this lesson by calling the Philippians to "stand firm in the Lord." But the question is, what do they need to stand firm in the face of? Wherein are they tempted to wobble? Here it gets complicated and readers of Paul have to work and engage deeply in the text and not superficial. A superficial reading would see a simple division between Christians and those who aren't (enemies of the cross). However the enemies of the cross Paul has in view also claim to be Christians. But they place their trust less in the cross of Christ and more in human distinctions, being marks of group belonging, like circumcision. Of course, circumcision is not the issue today. The issue today is more human ideology. Do we belong to the right group, share in the group think, live in the right neighborhood, so to speak? That is what Paul calls "setting our minds on earthly things." No, says Paul, stand firm in your trust in the radical grace of God revealed in the cross. We are saved not by our human constructions, markers, or achievements, but by God's grace in Jesus Christ.

### **Luke 13: 31 - 35**

So, here then is Jesus "standing firm." Curiously, it is "some Pharisees" who come to warn Jesus that "Herod wants to kill you." In this report Luke manages both to credit and discredit the Pharisees. He shows them concerned, seemingly, about Jesus, warning him; but at the same time he discredits them, showing that they are more concerned about human threats than faithfulness to God. Jesus responds by saying that his path is clear before him, and he is staying on it. That path includes Jerusalem and a cross. His mission/ purpose is more important than threats from the world's Herods. I often tell church leaders that you have to make your mission more

important than any one person or family, placing purpose ahead of relationships. Here we see Jesus doing that. In conclusion, Jesus offers a poignant lament for Jerusalem. He longs to lead the powerful and arrogant to return to God. His longing is like that of a hen wishing to gather her chicks. But it's hard to gather chicks who think they are roosters!