

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, April 12, 2010**

We turn now to the lectionary texts for the Third Sunday of Easter, not--please note-- Third Sunday after Easter. Easter is a seven-Sunday, fifty day season (10 days longer than Lent). Who's writing "Fifty Days of Purpose" or better, "Fifty Days of Praise"? Someone should.

### **Acts 9: 1- 6 (7 - 20)**

Arguably the most famous and most celebrated conversion story of them all, as Saul becomes Paul on the Road to Damascus. This story has been a blessing and a curse to the church and subsequent believers. Taken on its own merits, it is a powerful story of metanoia. But often this has been made into the normative template for all Christian experience, leaving some who haven't seen lights and heard voices, feel that their own faith is somehow inadequate for not mirroring Paul's dramatic experience. Better to treat the story as a particular account and as part of the unfolding story of Acts than as a norm for all. One way to frame interpretation is to contrast Saul of verse 1, "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord," with Paul of verse 6, sunk to his knees, and told by Jesus, "Get up, enter the city and you will be told what to do." In verse 1 Saul is a guy who is intent, in-charge and knows exactly what's what. By verse 6, Paul is a guy, receiving directions, awaiting further instruction. He passes from self-dependence to Other-dependence, from a self-centered to a God-centered life. He's no longer in charge. Including the optional verses makes it a double conversion story as the Christian believer, Ananias, finds himself directed to go to the aid of a dangerous enemy. God's word comes as a shock to Ananias, "He (Saul/ Paul) is the instrument I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles . . ." What an unexpected, strange and surprising God this is!

### **Revelation 5: 11 - 14**

Again, it may be helpful to consider all of Revelation as a kind of wild and wooly, visionary, ecstatic experience of worship and praise. And it is also helpful and important to remember the people to whom, for whom, it is written are experiencing great persecution and suffering. With that in mind the proclamation, "Worthy is the Lamb (i.e. Christ) that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honly and glory and blessing," is especially poignant and powerful for they are being slaughtered or threatened with slaughter. But the last has been made first, in God's strange and surprising wisdom. The lowly have been lifted high. The future does not belong to the Roman Caesar, Nero, but to the Lord, the true and only God, who is acclaimed by all creation. "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" Makes me think of the Pentecostal fellow I knew who was forever saying, "When the praises go up, the blessings come down." He didn't have in mind some sort of transactional exchange ("give praise, get blessing"), but rather that

when we lose ourselves in praise of the true God, our lives are restored and blessed.

### **John 21: 1 - 19**

A miraculous catch of fish, a breakfast on the beach, re-instatement and charge to Peter, and a coda sorting out the relationship of Peter and the one referred to in this Gospel as the "beloved disciple," make up this final chapter, which is a kind of afterword to the Fourth Gospel, given the concluding words of the previous chapter. It's like when you've finished a really great novel and want just a little more, an epilogue. This is John's epilogue. Note the initiative rests with God. Jesus calls to the unsuccessful fishermen with strange advice, "Cast your nets to the right side . . ." Likewise, it is Jesus who hosts the breakfast. They do not prepare it for him, but he for them. He feeds them. The sacrament, so to speak, is followed by the altar call. Peter is asked the famous three questions, none of which have to do with belief or doctrine per se, but love. "Do you love me?" Jesus asks Peter. Peter answers "yes" three times, and each time is instructed to feed and care for the Lord's sheep. Love for Jesus is expressed in love/ care for those Jesus loves. Worship gives rise to ethics. Grace to response. The last little scene where Peter asks Jesus about the Beloved Disciple isn't actually included in the appointed text, but it is a little gem. Peter wonders why the B.D.'s life and discipleship will unfold according to a different, and to Peter's perception, a less demanding path. Jesus basically says, "Not your business. Your business is to do what I told you." Often in churches, "compassion" and "concern" become an excuse for minding other's business and not getting on with your own. Stick to your knitting, says Jesus, so to speak.