

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, April 26, 2010**

We are now up to Easter V, which this year falls on May 2, 2010. Semi-continuous readings from Acts and Revelation continue. The gospel readings move into John's "Farewell Discourse," as the church prepares for Ascension and Pentecost.

### **Acts 11: 1 - 18**

Peter is on the hot seat in Jerusalem where the Jewish part of the church is wondering what in the world is going on with the new outreach to Gentiles. Note the tenor of Peter's response, "I was praying, in a trance . . . I saw a vision . . . I heard a voice . . . the Spirit told me." What would happen if someone spoke in this way to the official board of your church or to the committee on clergy of your denomination? At least in some places, chances are good they would be referred out for psychological evaluation. The point here is that this wasn't Peter's idea or plan, but God's. One of the best things about reading Acts in the church today is the way it exposes us to a church that is God/ Spirit led. Peter ends his "testimony" (for that is what this is, not a reasoned, analytical argument or presentation) by saying (vs. 17), "If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" What a great question: "Who was I that I could hinder God?" It implies that we can help or hinder God. How do we do either or both? How can clergy and churches, in a certain sense, get out of the way so as not to hinder God?

### **Revelation 21: 1 - 6**

In the previous passage from Acts Peter has spoken of seeing a vision. Here, as is pretty much true of all of Revelation, a vision is set forth, given to us. And what a powerful vision it is . . . a new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem where God dwells among the people. Note that the vision is not simply of individual regeneration, but a new earth and a new city where God reigns. Originally, this word came to a heavily persecuted, suffering church. What good news. So too this word comes to us when we suffer and our world breaks apart. Our pain, and tears, are known. And yet, despite all, God is God, God reigns, Christ is the beginning and the end. Faith is always speaking of a new beginning, of starting over. And these verses do that in the most beautiful and profound way.

### **John 13: 31 - 35**

As noted above, we now move for the remainder of the gospel readings in Eastertide to the Farewell Discourse of the 4th Gospel. It is a section (chapters 13 - 17) that is really unique to this gospel. In it, Jesus, who is about to "leave them," prepares his closest followers for what is to come, for their life and ministry after he has been glorified, which is John's way of talking about the crucifixion and resurrection. The heart of these verses is what we refer to on Maundy Thursday as the "new commandment." "Love one another. Just as I have loved you should love one

another." So often in the church we substitute being nice, or trying to be nice, to one another for loving one another. Love is a riskier business. In my devotion on this passage for the UCC Still Speaking Devotions, I played with the theme of triangulation, noting that we are often today cautioned about creating triangulation in relationships. But here, there is a sense in which Jesus invites us to put him into the triangle in our relationships with others. Let, he says, your relationship to and with me determine and guide your relationship with others, perhaps especially in the community of faith. When we struggle with one of those relationships, as we all do, talk it over with Jesus, ask Jesus to come into that relationship. Triangulate around him. That is one triangulation that is okay.