

## Weekly Reading – Monday, May 18, 2009

On our screen here are the appointed texts of the Common Lectionary for Sunday, May 24, 2009, which is the Seventh Sunday of Easter and last before Pentecost, next Sunday.

Acts 1: 15 - 17, 21 - 26

Ending at the beginning, so to speak, the Eastertide series from Acts concludes with a story from Acts 1 about the selection of a successor to Judas. The vivid description of Judas' "bowels gushing out" is omitted, directing the focus to the process for selecting Matthias. This process is one of the several case-studies in Acts of the church practicing discernment as a mode of decision-making. Verse 24, "Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen . . .'" One might pass quickly over this, but pausing is worthwhile for we see a couple of things. Choosing/ calling leaders is a "God-thing." People are called not because they have applicable real world skills ("we need a lawyer") but because of the spiritual maturity and the condition of their heart. And, finally, prayer is at the center of everything the church is and does. So often today church decision-making seems pretty secularized. Here's its not figuring out what we think is best, but asking God what God wants and thinks is best. Then, weirdly enough, they "cast lots," which probably meant stones were shaken in a cup and poured out indicating which of the nominees got the 12th spot. The church trusted God could work through such ordinary, even profane, methods. But the point is, it's about what God wants.

I John 5: 9 - 13

This is the final reading in this series from I John and ends, fittingly, by stressing God's revelation in Christ and Christ's gift of eternal life to all who believe in him. So, verse 11, "And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." Now, here's what's notable: the verb tenses. Eternal life is a present reality, not something that begins at the point of or after death. This is the consistent message in the entire John collection. Eternal life is a present reality (or not). It is less a quantity of life than a quality of life. Deathless life. Those who trust in Jesus Christ pass from death to life. As Fred Craddock likes to say, "If eternal life hasn't begun this side of grave, there's little reason to believe it will suddenly begin on the other side." Not just life after death, but Life before death is the point. If we get that right, the other (life after death) will take care of itself.

John 17: 6 - 19

The gospel reading for the Seventh Sunday of Easter is always some portion of the "high priestly prayer" of Jesus which concludes the Farewell Discourse. Jesus prays for his disciples. Jesus prays for his community. Jesus prays for us. Imagine! Good news, Jesus is praying for you, for me and for us. Jesus asks three things of the Father (Yes it really is a prayer, note the first verse, "I have made your name known . . ." He talks to God). First, he prays that they will stick together, "So that they may be one as we are one." Again the theme of John 15, staying connected. Connected to the Father, to the Son, to one another. Second,

Jesus acknowledges that being connected to him will put his folks in tension with, and at odds with "the world." Therefore, he asks that God protect them. "They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." Christian faith is not about fitting into this world, is not an accessory to a successful life. It will make life challenging for you (and good). But this does not mean his followers are to drop out. On the contrary, and point three of the prayer, Jesus sends them into the world as the Father has sent him. He asks that they be "sanctified," that is made holy and set apart for this calling. Here we continue a long, long theme, reaching back to the story of Israel, a people set apart (sanctified) that they might be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. The intriguing idea is that the church blesses people best by being itself and being faithful to its Lord.