

## Weekly Reading – Monday, June 1, 2009

The lessons on the menu are those for Sunday, June 7, 2009. This first Sunday after Pentecost is designated "Trinity Sunday." After it we enter Ordinary Time, during which the lectionary returns to the Gospel of the Year, Mark. In the three lessons, the work of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is interwoven and interpenetrating. The Trinity here is less a concept to be explained than a reality to be experienced.

Isaiah 6: 1 - 8

The call of prophet Isaiah, is a stunning and awesome encounter with God. This is a God who is not sweet and gentle, but high and lifted up. How often today people speak of God's presence as in the main calming, soothing, or comforting. Not here! Here God is majestic and mighty, and God's presence is shattering and commanding. One may discern in this text the classic four part movement or pattern of worship: entry into God's presence "I saw the Lord," confession ("I am a sinful man") and forgiveness, hearing God's word ("Who will go for us?" and response ("Here am I, send me"). Recently I've been reading theologian George Stroup's *Before God*, in which he argues that this experience of "beforeness," *coram Deo*--before God--is elemental to faith and faith shaped by Scripture. And yet this very category, life lived before God, has been eclipsed in our time. How? Why? No easy answer, but part of it is the modern "turn to the subject." Theology morphs into anthropology and therapy. It's all about us, our issues, our needs, our problems. This text locates or re-locates us *coram Dei*, before God.

Romans 8: 12 - 17

Of this text Martin Luther said, "It were good that this text were written in letters of gold, so admirable it is, and so full of comfort." And what accounts for Luther's enthusiasm? Verses 16 and 17, "It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ . . ." Children and heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ. By God's grace we are heirs and heiresses to a great and awesome heritage (is there a the relation of "heir" and "heritage?") Imagine making or receiving the call that tells an unsuspecting, indeed unlikely, person that they are heir/ heiress to a great estate or grand fortune. Preachers get to make that call in their sermon. Preachers get to say, "You are not slaves but children of the Most High God and heirs! You are somebody!" But note, in the final verse, this heritage has two parts: suffering and glory. Not one or the other, but both.

John 3: 1 - 17

A common pattern in the fourth Gospel is to have an event, incident, encounter or sign (miracle) followed by a discourse. So here the event/ encounter is that of the Pharisee, Nicodemus, with Jesus. Though Nicodemus seems to fade into the background as early as verse 8, it is at verse 11 that the discourse, which then continues throughout the remainder of the chapter, begins in earnest. Preachers may choose to lean toward the discourse section (11 - 17) or the encounter (1 - 8), or and perhaps best, the relationship of the two. Nicodemus is

simultaneously a religious expert (leaders of the Jews) and a seeker. These dual identities mean that he comes to Jesus, but by night, that is, under cover of darkness. Nicodemus hopes to get what can only be given and received, not gained or acquired. Hence his bafflement about getting again into his mother's womb. This is the link between the encounter and the discourse and returns us to the theme, noted above, of *corem Dei*, before God. We do not ascend to God, whether by knowledge, technique, position or virtue. God descends, comes to, us and to the world. Verse 13: "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." This is not the kerygma of Jesus, guide and companion on the way, but the kerygma of Christ, Christ the reigning and ruling incarnate Word of God.