

## Weekly Reading – Monday, July 20, 2009

We turn now to the lessons for Sunday, July 26, 2009. This will be Proper 12 and the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. I will offer comments on both Old Testament lessons, the semi-continuous choice and the typological one.

### II Samuel 11: 1 - 15

When we began this series from the epic story of David, he was the unexpected, faith-filled, God-reliant and youthful hero. Now, many battles and conquests later, sitting high on the throne, David falls into the depths. From his rooftop, David beheld the lovely Bathsheba at her bath. First, David inquired about her, discovering she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David disregards that bit of information. He sends for Bathsheba and "he lay with her." The plot thickens when Bathsheba discovers she is pregnant. Moreover, Uriah is off fighting David's wars so he can't be the father, can he? David tries to pin it on Uriah by bringing him home from battle and giving him R and R. But Uriah refuses the comforts of home while his comrades are still in the heat of battle. Stop here and note that Uriah is the most moral person on the scene--really exemplary--and Uriah is not an Israelite. No, he is a foreigner, a Hittite. In other words, a foreigner provides ethical instruction and example to God's own people (and king). Thus does Scripture tell us two things. First, neither race or ethnicity or nation insure merit or virtue or that one is "in" with God. Second, Israel's "chosenness" is all about God's grace and not a whit about Israel's virtue. More can be said about this fateful story, along the lines of "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when at first we practice to deceive." No one is above God's judgment, neither king nor president. No one is beyond God's grace, though sin has its consequences and costs.

### II Kings 4: 42 - 44

The typological choice, from the stories of the prophet Elisha, fits nicely with the gospel lesson and John's story of the feeding of the 5,000. There is some food, but not nearly enough, thus Elisha's servant asks, "How can I set this before 100 people?" In faith, Elisha commands that the bread they have be given to the people, promising "They shall eat and have some left." With the Lord there is enough, and as it turns out, more than enough. Faith, at least at times, means being obedient to God's word even when common sense tells us that it is foolish, impossible or that it won't work. Of course, there are countervailing texts, as the one where Jesus speaks of figuring out what it will take to conduct a war or build a tower (or be a disciple) before you begin. That is to say, one can be a fool for the Lord or one can be simply a damn fool.

### Ephesians 3: 14 - 21

Now, here is a magnificent prayer, a wonderful pastoral prayer. So often Paul is at his best when he simply bursts into prayer or song, into praise of God, as he does here. And what does the apostle pray for the saints at Ephesus and wherever you are? That they might be filled up with the love, knowledge and grace of God, "filled with all the fullness of God." (vs. 19) That Christ would so dwell in their hearts that they would be rooted and grounded in love

(vs. 17). One might link this to the gospel lesson where Jesus comes to the weary, storm-tossed disciples. He comes to dwell/ abide with them. The final verses are a wonderful benediction. The entire prayer puts the focus, properly, on God; on the breadth and length, height and depth (vs.19) of God's grace and love manifest in Christ Jesus. So often, this is the "one thing needed," to point to God, to point ourselves to God. Too often what we get instead is a pre-occupation with ourselves, how we feel or ought to feel, how we think or ought to think. It's God we need.

#### John 6: 1 - 21

This is the first of a series of five lessons from the sixth chapter of John. As is the pattern in John there is an event followed by a discourse or teaching. Actually two events, John's version of the feeding of the 5,000 and then the story of Jesus walking upon the water. In earlier versions of the lectionary only the first of these two (1- 15) was included. Now we have both, the feeding and the water walk. Preachers face a decision, to preach on one, and then which one, or on both? Both are a lot, but might be approached this way: after the feeding, the crowd having had its hunger filled (for the moment) concludes Jesus is the one and prepares to take him and make him their king. In the walking on water story, the disciples do not "take" Jesus but receive him. He comes to them. Two different types of "spirituality," if you will. One would take God and fit God to our needs and agendas. The other receives God, in great fear and trembling, and wonders what it all means. This ties in to John's particular presentation of the feeding of the 5,000, upon which changes will be rung throughout the remainder of John 6. For John, this is not a story about compassion, but about revelation. Jesus is not just feeding a lost and hungry crowd. He is revealing God. Thus, he asks them to look beyond the bread to The Bread. But the crowd, as we shall see next week, sees only the bread.