

## Weekly Reading – Monday, July 27, 2009

Here are my comments on the lections for Sunday, August 2, 2009. The Old Testament semi-continuous gives us the high drama encounter of King David and Prophet Nathan; while the typological complements the second of five gospel readings from John 6, "I am the Bread of Life." In the epistle, Paul turns to the life to which we have been called and life together in the Body of Christ.

II Samuel 11: 26 - 12: 13a

The semi-continuous Old Testament option continues the selections from the story of David with one of the most famous scenes of them all: the prophet Nathan confronts the king, David, with his adultery and his murder of Uriah. (Note: Uriah who is the morally exemplary person in the story is not an Israelite, but a foreigner, a Hittite! The Biblical story again and again avoids pride of nation or race, showing outsiders like Ruth and Uriah as more moral than God's "chosen people.") Nathan is a wise prophet and preacher. He does not try to come in through "the front door," that is confront David directly. No, he comes in through the back door, telling a story that arouses David's indignation. Only then does Nathan insert the prophetic dagger: "You are the man." So there is something here on the matter of self-deception, as David could listen to this story and not put two and two together. He was blind to his own sin, though it was plenty flagrant. We humans have a tremendous capacity for self-deception. A second thought on this classic story: Nathan's confrontation tells us, "You can't con God." You can con other people. You can even fool yourself. But you can't con God. God knows what's going on. Is that bad news or good news?

Exodus 16: 2 -4, 9 - 15

The typological choice for the Old Testament lesson ties in nicely, as it should, with the gospel lesson. In that passage, from John, Jesus will make the point that the bread is not the point. But it's not as if Moses hadn't made the same point. The point is not bread, but faith and trust in the power, mercy and grace of God. The wilderness journey is a learning phase, as the once enslaved people "learn God." They, like us, are slow learners. Worse, stubborn and self-righteous ones. Like contemporary tax protesters who demand more services and also demand lower taxes, the wilderness generation demand God produce. God promises to give them manna in such regularity and quantity that they will become sick of it! The trick, for preachers, is to identify with and help congregations to identify with the people rather than God. Rather than standing in judgment, stand under judgment.

Ephesians 4: 1 - 16

One might meditate on the opening verse of this text a good long time, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." The calling is to follow Christ Jesus, which is to say that we are talking about the calling of every Christian and not only clergy or other professionals. To lead a life worthy of your calling. That's the work of a lifetime, starting today. Paul goes on to stress the unity of the Body of Christ, the church. So a good part of the calling of each Christian is to, as Paul

puts it, "build up the Body," that is the church. "Building up the body," ought not be reduced to membership growth. It means being the kind of body part that contributes to the health and vitality of the whole, a whole which is larger than the sum of its parts. The opposite of this is the malignant body part, which requires all other parts to sacrifice themselves to its own selfish agenda. Too often talk about "calling" is entirely individual and preoccupied with "my calling." A Christian's calling is a calling to "build up the body," a strong and healthy community of faith that it may be a sign to the world.

John 6: 24 - 35

This is now the second installment in the multi-week series of lessons from John 6. The plot thickens. The crowd, which had been fed the day before and had wanted to seize Jesus and make him king, now pursues Jesus to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Then unfolds one of those wonderful Johannine, Fourth Gospel, dialogues where Jesus and those with whom he speaks seem to be in different worlds. The crowd asks, "Rabbi, how did you get here?" Jesus answers, "You're not looking for me because you saw the sign, but because you want more bread." Back and forth goes the frustrating conversation. They want more miracles. He wants them to give their hearts and lives to his new possibility. They want a quick fix. He wants a change of heart. They want a "chicken in every pot." He wants a change in every heart. They demand more stuff of him; he asks more life of them. In some ways, this is John's extended version of the synoptic's temptation story, or at least that part of it where satan says, "Turn these stones into bread." Jesus is here to turn hearts of stone into hearts for God. It's a tough sell, then and now. But some, in every generation, do hear and heed.