

Weekly Reading – Monday, July 28, 2008

Next Sunday is August 3, 2008, and those are the lessons upon which we focus here. Also the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time and Proper 13. Do we ever have "Improvers?"

Isaiah 55: 1 – 5

This familiar reading from the tail-end of Second Isaiah sets up the Gospel lesson and its feeding story very well. Note the admission criteria to the feast of the Lord: you have to be thirsty and empty. You come to the feast not because you've got it all together, but because you don't. In a culture that spends a lot of time trying to fill us up, add stuff, get more, this one says that the way to spiritual life is to get empty. The paradoxes here are wonderful. "Come buy wine and milk without money or price." How do you buy stuff that has no price and when you have no money? And that great question, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, your labor for that which does not satisfy?" Well, why do you?

Romans 9: 1 – 5

Now begins the great agonizing issue/ discussion of this section of Romans. What of the children of Abraham, the people of the covenant, Paul's own people, God's own people? It would have been so easy for Paul to simply read them out of the story, to write them off, to say "Done with you!" Just think of how often those who are possessed of some new truth, way, or part of a new movement do that with respect to those who have gone before. And of course Christianity has had and continues to have a very strong streak of super-secessionism. But Paul doesn't do that, doesn't go there. And he doesn't finally for theological reasons, and it is a theological argument he begins here. God is God, God is faithful. We don't know when or how, but God has a plan and purpose and God's people, the Jews, are irrevocably part of it. Paul will not relinquish what or who God has claimed and called. Preachers who take this on will find it challenging, but important. Too often the pulpit is silent on these thorny, challenging issues.

Matthew 14: 13 – 21

This is one of those artist's canvasses that has one story layered over others and then, down the hall, there are those portraits and stories that build upon it. Looking through the portrait of the feeding of the 5,000 one sees Israel in the midst of the wilderness journey, receiving manna from heaven. Looking on down the hall, to the next collection of painting, one sees the church gathered at the table for eucharist. Past, present and future caught up in the eternal now of the presence of God transcending time and sanctifying our days! The key dramatic moment is the interaction with the disciples who are inclined, reasonably I think, to wrap this little scene up and send the people back to the McDonalds and Burger King in the nearest town (that which does not satisfy!). Charge: "You give them something to eat." "We have nothing:" scarcity! "Only a couple of loaves and a few measly fish! "Bring them to me!" Who among us, preachers, baptized Christians, has not found ourselves facing a hunger that scared us because our resources seemed so paltry. Give what you have to Jesus. Place it in his service. He will bless it and break it and make it enough, and more than enough--note the

left-overs. Where Jesus is, there is abundance. But there's a hitch. We aren't just by-standers. We are participants in the miracle. No participation, no miracle. Don't just wait for the miracle, participate in one instead!