

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, August 4, 2008**

In view in this post are the lessons for Sunday August 10, 2008, which is the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time and Proper 14.

### **I Kings 19: 9 - 18**

Love this text! The prophet Elijah at the cave on Mt. Horeb. Important to remember that this occurs after a great triumph. Elijah had challenged the prophets of Ba'al, who were in the employ of the corrupt King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. After the successful prophetic slamdown, Jezebel threatens to nail Elijah, Elijah's spirits sink, he flees into the desert, praying that God will put him out of his misery. How do we account for the mood swings? Tough gig, being a prophet! When he makes it to Mt. Horeb, Elijah crawls into a cave, after which wind, earthquake and fire swirl about him, but God was not in the special effects. Modernist interpreters tended to seize on "the still small voice," which fit well with the emphasis on rationality and religion. I find the dramatic climax elsewhere, in God's confrontation with Elijah's combination of grandiosity and self-pity. "I alone am left," moans Elijah. "Nonsense," says God. There are many more who are faithful, and you have a job to do, which includes appointing the next generation of leaders in the resistance movement. For all modern prophets who feel utterly alone this text is a powerful word of challenge and ultimately grace.

### **Romans 10: 5 - 15**

Paul draws on Deuteronomy 30: 11 - 14 to further his argument that salvation comes from faith/trust and not works of the law. That is, salvation comes from Other dependence and God trust not self-reliance or our fevered projects. Fits very well with the preceding story of Elijah. The interesting twist, also derived from the Deuteronomy 30 text which says that the "Word is very near you, on your lips and in your heart," is the emphasis Paul gives to confessing our faith with our lips. "Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Calvin too stressed the importance of verbal confession of faith, calling the unwillingness to do so, "Nicodemism," or something like that, referencing the Jewish leader Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night and never went public with his faith. An interesting challenge for "cultural Christians" who may not wish to arouse suspicion by publically declaring our faith! Can you "have" something which you cannot or will not express and articulate yourself?

### **Matthew 14: 22 - 33**

And doesn't this story also go well with the Elijah account? The setting is post-feeding of the 5,000. So as with Elijah there has been a "high moment." But now Jesus is off somewhere and the disciples and their boat are bucking tough winds. Jesus walks to them across the troubled sea, Lord of wind and wave, of all that threatens to sink our little boat. Peter asks Jesus to "command me to come to you on the water." Why not? "Come." Note the following: "So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on water . . ." He was doing it! If you can remember learning to ride a bike or ice skating for the first time, you can perhaps recall the

first moment you were doing it. But then you notice you are doing it, you think about what you're doing, and splat!! In Peter's case, "he noticed the strong winds and became frightened," and then he was in trouble, calling out "Jesus, save me." There are many ways one may go with the this story. "Faith means getting out of the boat." "Faith walks, fear sinks." Or maybe we aren't supposed to walk on water or be utterly self-reliant? We need Jesus, and he is there. "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him." Is the point that Peter should have kept his faith and focused on Jesus and then been able to stride over chaos and wave? Or is the point that he/we can't but that Jesus comes and saves us? Why not both? We human beings are at least two-dimensional, one foot in heaven, one on earth; partaking of the infinite, and yet mortal and finite; or, as the American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne put it, "marble and mud."