

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, September 7, 2009**

We are looking now at the lessons of the Revised Common Lectionary for Sunday, September 13, 2009. For many congregations this first Sunday after Labor Day will be a homecoming or re-gathering Sunday. Whether the lectionary helps or hinders that cause and spirit, I'll leave it to you to decide!

### **Proverbs 1: 20 - 33**

The Old Testament semi-continuous choice/ option continues in the world of wisdom literature and the Book of Proverbs. Wisdom is personified, and personified as a woman. She "cries out in the street," which is to say that the way of wisdom is not gnostic, secret knowledge, meant for the chosen few. It is right out in the open, evident in God's ordering of the world. "At the busiest corner she cries out." One thinks of the Yogi Berra quip, "You can see a lot by looking." Paying attention, noticing what's going on, observing life is an important skill. Wisdom's counsel and teaching is offered, but scoffers and fools don't pay attention or take heed, which leads to a rather grim conclusion. "Because you have ignored all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes." Set against the back-drop of the now year long recession, these words ring sharply. What simple wisdom was being ignored leading to the crash? What lessons have been learned? Will they stick, or be forgotten when the next bubble entices? Or what about the current debate over health care? "Because they hated knowledge . . . would have none of my counsel . . . therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way." The world of wisdom is a predictable world. Good choices yield good results; bad choices calamity and mis-fortune. It seems preachers who wish to speak of wisdom heeded or spurned have a lot to work with!

### **Isaiah 50: 4 - 9a**

A lection that is familiar to us for its Lent and Holy Week usage, it is one of the "songs of the suffering servant of the Lord." As such it is a fit choice to companion this week's gospel reading. Heeding the word of the Lord ("The Lord God opened my ear, and I was not rebellious") seems to result in a tough go in the world, which is not what wisdom/ Proverbs says! ("I gave my back to those who struck me; and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard.") What kind of wierdos pull out someone's beard? Anyhow, the point seems to be that being faithful doesn't mean being successful or winning friends and influencing people. Shucks.

### **James 3: 1 - 12**

Nor does James seem to be particularly interested in winning friends and influencing people, to use the Dale Carnegie mantra. James actually discourages people who are thinking about becoming teachers! (This on the first Sunday after many have gone back to school, and when some churches are still trying to talk folks into teaching Sunday School). "Not many of you should become teachers," leads into an extended reflection on the power, and danger, of the tongue. "How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire!" Indeed. And in congregations

modern technology, like email, has just such a sparking and incendiary effect if there is fuel lying about. "No one can tame the tongue, a restless evil, full of deadly poison." James just isn't that cheerful is he? So what do we do with this? Simply be very, very careful about what we say? James himself does not seem to offer answer or solution, only stark warning.

### **Mark 8: 27 - 38**

Here is a kind of watershed text in Mark, early on in the section on discipleship and the cross, which runs from 8:22 through 10:52. Scholars note the section begins and ends with the healing of a person who is blind. And the front bookend healing of a person who is blind story takes two tries on Jesus' part. What's that about? Well, it seems to suggest that people come to Jesus because of the apparent benefits--healing, freedom from demons, bread. But this is partial sight at best. Staying with Jesus and full sight entail a cost, entail a cross. And so Peter in our lection sees ("You are the Messiah") and he is blind ("And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.") And in turn, Jesus rebuked Peter, and did so sharply. In a way, this links back to the opening reading from Proverbs. A theme of wisdom is that the wise are not those who never need rebuke. They are those who listen to and heed a rebuke. The testy exchange with Peter leads into talk of self-denial, of losing one's life to find it. Now here's a challenging theme for "Homecoming," "Welcome Back" to church Sunday! But then, perhaps in a world where lies are routine, it might be refreshing to hear a hard truth?