

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, September 28, 2009**

Here are some comments on the lectionary texts for Sunday, October 4, 2009, which is Proper 22 and the Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time. It will also be observed in many congregations as "World-Wide Communion Sunday."

### **Job 1: 1 - 2; 2: 1 - 10**

The semi-continuous Old Testament selection, tracking the wisdom texts/ theme, now move into a four part series from the Book of Job. This lesson gives us the introduction of Job, followed by the second scene set in the heavenly court and a second conversation between God and Satan, the tester. In their first tete-a-tete, God had given Satan leave to strip Job of land, livestock, home and family. Now in round two, Job's own body is afflicted with "loathsome sores." The question at stake is, "Does faithfulness to God, and moral goodness, depend on apparent benefits and rewards?" or "will a good man maintain his faith and decency in face of suffering and pain?" It is interesting that the question here is partly about God and partly about man and the nature of each. Moreover, note this, God is the one who has faith in human beings, or in this case Job; while Satan is the cynic. There have been many books, fiction and non-fiction, that have riffed on Job. William Safire, who died this past weekend, wrote one of the best on Job as *The First Dissident*. Preachers doing a series on Job may wish to consult Safire.

### **Genesis 2: 18 - 24**

The typological Old Testament choice, to accompany the gospel reading, is from the creation story, or as some would have it, the second creation story, considering Genesis one, the first, and Genesis 2 a second. Maybe, maybe not. It begins with the affirmation that human beings are by nature social and that we become who we are in relationship. "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a partner for him." It seems as if God proceeds rather by trial and error, creating a host of creatures, birds and beasts, in search of a fit partner. "But for the man there was not found a helper as his partner." This sets the dramatic stage for the coming of the "right" partner, "Woman," and the man's note of delight and gratitude, "This at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Of course, all sorts of political and ethical conclusions and agendas have been attributed to this delightful, and in some ways, child-like account. Before we know we are in the pitched battles of the culture wars. I prefer to savor the delight of relationship longed for and relationship found, or better, received.

### **Hebrews 1: 1 - 4; 2: 5 - 12**

Well, if you weren't happy with the moral sternness of James and yearned for higher theology and Christology, you are in luck with the next epistle series, as we turn to Hebrews. Right off the bat, in verses 1 - 4, we are into a high Christology of the pre-existent Christ, through whom God created the worlds. (Note the plural). "He is the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." No Jesus as wandering sage, companion on the journey, or spiritual guru here. "When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." What's at stake here begins to become

evident in the second part of the reading at 2:5, "Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels." The author, throughout the epistle, will seek to combat a spiritual/ theological view that sees the world and human life controlled and at the behest of an array of divine forces, "angels," who must be divined and placated by anxious humans. Against this, Hebrews asserts the oneness of God and the rule and sufficiency of Christ. Now this may sound distant and foreign to us, but maybe it isn't? We do live in a world of many gods, many powers, and certainly a world of great anxiety. By Hebrews declaration of Christ and the sufficiency of grace, the author seeks to embolden human beings, encouraging us not to cower in fear of multiple supernatural forces and powers but to stand in faith, faith in the sufficiency of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Preach that!

### **Mark 10: 2 - 16**

It is, however, (see above) a challenge when this gospel reading is read not to feel obligated to preach on it, as it brings up marriage and divorce. Perhaps divorce and what we are to think/ feel about it are not quite so "hot" an issue as it was twenty-five years ago, but many in the congregation, any congregation, will have been touched, one way or another, by the pain of divorce. Is Jesus simply and categorically condemning or forbidding divorce? I've never thought that was the issue here exactly. It has seemed to me, rather, that it is about the way in which people, the Pharisees being the example cited here, use religion to sanctify selfishness. Thus the proscription against divorce in 2: 11 - 12 is certainly strong and real, but seems to me less about what to do when a marriage isn't working than it is a forbidding of simply tossing off one spouse in favor of another one who you think suits your needs more. The second part of the lesson again features Jesus receiving children, with the point being that simple trust is the basis of participation in God's kingdom and reign and not human achievement.