

Weekly Reading – Monday, October 27, 2008

Our focus here are the lessons for Sunday, November 2, Proper 26 and Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time. I imagine that some preachers may chose to use the lessons for All Saints Day, November 1. November 2 is All Souls. It is also the ending of Daylight Savings Time.

Micah 3: 5 - 12

The problem of false prophets nicely prepares the way for Jesus' denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in the gospel lesson. Prophets are the named focus and culprits in verses 5 - 8. After that Micah turns more "inclusive," including priests and rulers in his indictment. Their sin? They do not say what God has given them to say, but what people want to hear. The rulers "abhor justice and pervert all equity." It's interesting that perversion is always associated, these days, with sex and not with a perversion of justice. These "prophets" say "The Lord is with us, no harm shall come." What are you saying and hearing during this time of economic crisis? Is it, "Things will be all right"? Is anyone saying, we are experiencing God's judgment upon our greed and short-sightedness, not to mention our worship of false gods? "Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins."

I Thessalonians 2: 9 - 13

The focus begun in last week's reading carries on as Paul reflects on his ministry among the Christians at Thessalonika. "We worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to gospel of God." Contrast this with the false prophets indicted by Micah or the scribes and Pharisees who come under Jesus' rebuke in Matthew. Paul did not sponge off the Thessalonians, nor use his office or position to feather his own nest. And what of preachers, priests, and clergy today? If Paul didn't do these things, what did he do? He "proclaimed the gospel of God." The negative critique is, do we contemporary leaders sponge off others, need others to make us okay? The positive is, have we faithfully and winsomely proclaimed not ourselves but the gospel of God, that is the good news of what God has done that changes everything. As Paul notes in the final verse, this good news is not "a human word . . . but God's word, which is at work in you believers." The Word of God is active and alive, "at work in you believers." I am not sure many contemporary preachers have such, or sufficient confidence, in God's word. At least I don't hear it in many sermons.

Matthew 23: 1 - 12

A tough, even sad, text in which Jesus says of the religious leaders of his own people, pay attention to what they say because they hold an office that is important, but don't do what they do because they are phony, self-regarding not God-regarding. Their real agenda is themselves, building up their ego, status, and prominence. It's a hard indictment because even the best among us, perhaps particularly the best, will know that their faithfulness is often compromised by self-regard, concern for appearance, and pleasure in the notice of others and status. Certainly too often true for me, I confess. But this is not only an indictment of hypocrisy, it is a call to attention. You have one teacher, one Father, one instructor, one

Christ. In this we hear Matthew's particular theme, that Jesus is the new Moses, the authoritative teacher, Pay Attention! The point is to wrest our attention from ourselves and put it where it properly belongs, on Jesus Christ. This can be preached as a moral lesson, a caution against self-exaltation and admonition to humility. That's okay but not enough. There's really more, if not a theophany, then a reminder that one has occurred. "This is my Son, listen to him." You have one Teacher, one Christ. It's not about you. It's about Him. man, but the church.