

## **Weekly Reading – Monday, November 16, 2009**

The lessons for the coming Sunday, November 22, 2009 are those for the final Sunday of the liturgical year, Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday. As such they emphasize important, if challenging, themes of Christ's (different type of) final rule. Given that this is also the Sunday before the Thanksgiving holiday, some preachers may choose that as their theme and use the lessons for Thanksgiving Day. My comments, which follow, are on the Reign of Christ texts.

### **II Samuel 23: 1 - 7**

These words are attributed to David (some debate about that) and are described as an "oracle." Should you be wondering (I was) an "oracle" is defined as "a wise or authoritative utterance." Someone who is an oracle imparts inspired words or revelation, which is claimed here in verse 2. Know any oracles? Heard an oracle lately? Sometimes "last words" or "dying words" are viewed as oracular, the thought being that poised between this world and the next one utters truth. David's oracle here asserts that God has made an "everlasting covenant" with his house or the Davidic line and lineage. In the context of Christ the King day, this "backgrounds" the other two texts which speak, in quite different ways, of the fulfillment of that promise in the Kingship of Christ. Some will cast doubt on the relevance of the "King" metaphor. But it did seem to have plenty of currency recently in describing "The King of Pop," Michael Jackson.

### **Revelation 1: 4b - 8**

The question that underlies this lesson and the next one for the church is "What does it mean to confess Christ as our King?" But as you ponder that, keep in mind what we know of the setting of this text, which is that of persecuted Christians suffering under the Romans, possibly the Emperor Nero. To claim the coming again of Christ when you are dying at the hands of brutal earthly kings is different than charging into battle to kill "infidels" in Christ's name! Those on the underside find hope in these powerful images of the crucified Christ coming again at the end of time and the assertion that he is the Alpha and the Omega. Can we too find hope in such bold proclamations of faith? Can we claim such images for ourselves? Typically more liberal Christians have been cautious (or timid?) about such "end of time" images. But perhaps they need to be reclaimed? Perhaps we need to find ways to proclaim the reign and rule of the crucified and risen Christ and to do so boldly.

### **John 18: 33 - 37**

Preaching on this text, especially the Sunday before Thanksgiving (see above), is a challenge. All but very high-church folks will wonder why we are suddenly in the passion story again. Preachers are well-advised to spend a (brief) time preparing/ explaining and getting folks on board. Preachers are also well advised to read the preceding verses (to themselves) and understand the larger drama and the various players in shaping their interpretation. We see the Jewish leaders are very careful to exhibit and protect their piety by not entering Pilate's palace (it would make them unclean on the Sabbath) or by getting involved in an execution

(though they are very much involved). So this is really as strong an indictment of religion and its failures as will be found anywhere. No need to read the current crop of religion's critics (Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris et. al.). Scripture indicts religion more persuasively than any of these critics. Secular power, in the person of Pilate, is also indicted, as Pilate reveals himself bound by politics and public opinion and unable to do what he knows to be right. So the bound man, Jesus, is the only truly free person here. Before Christ and the cross, all are judged and found guilty. Another related theme is the odd nature of Christ's rule and kingship which is not of this world. That does not mean that it applies to some other "spiritual" realm. It means that Christ's way of rule is radically different than the way earthly power rules and conducts itself. It does not belong, he does not belong, to this fallen age. Here is both judgment and grace. As I say these are challenging texts, but also very important ones. Courage preacher!